

ANGLIA RUSKIN UNIVERSITY

REFLECTIONS ON THE NEWLY QUALIFIED SOCIAL  
WORKER'S JOURNEY: FROM UNIVERSITY TRAINING  
TO QUALIFIED PRACTICE.

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A thesis in partial fulfilment of the requirements of Anglia  
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ANGLIA RUSKIN UNIVERSITY  
ABSTRACT

FACULTY OF HEALTH, SOCIAL CARE AND EDUCATION

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

REFLECTIONS ON THE NEWLY QUALIFIED SOCIAL WORKERS  
JOURNEY: FROM UNIVERSITY TRAINING TO QUALIFIED  
PRACTICE.

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This qualitative research study explores the experience of graduating social workers making the transition from university training into work as qualified social work practitioners. Most studies in this area look at the practice readiness of the newly qualified professional. This study looks at the participants' experience in the work place. How do participants experience this journey of transition? What skills, particularly reflective practice and supervision, learned in training, are important to them?

Eight graduates were interviewed three times as they began to practice, after six months and at the end of year one. Four people worked in children's services, four in adult services. The methodology adopted for this research was Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA).

These findings suggest there is a process of transition that has three strands, phased development, a professional strand and a psychological /emotional strand. These strands are unique and taken together give a holistic view of an individual's journey of transition. Across the eight participants there were commonalities and divergences between transition experiences. However a model of transition did emerge which may be applicable to other professional spheres.

Reflective practice and supervision appear to be key elements of a newly qualified social workers practice. All participants received supervision; for the majority supervision was focused on case discussions and the social workers decision making: Little place was given to reflection on practice this was seen as an activity that worker's carried out on their own in their car following a home visit, or on the way home at the end of the working day. There was no clear model of reflective practice used.

A further finding concerns the methodology IPA, particularly this researcher's experience of bracketing and research journaling as part of the research process.

Key Words: Social work, Transition, Student transition, NQSW, ASYE, IPA.

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## **Chapter 1 Overview and conceptual framework**

### **1.1 First ideas and development**

This research has grown out of many years' interest and familiarity with the issues of transition. The first time I considered aspects of transition was in 1991 when, as part of a group of social work management colleagues working on a book "On Becoming a Manager" (Darvil et al (1992)), we looked at issues of practice for those new to management. This book offered tools and strategies to those about to become a first-line manager in social work. As a group we began to think about our own journeys of transition from social worker to first-line manager. All our stories were unique but all shared a common component: a journey over time from gaining the job to feeling like a manager.

I then developed these ideas further through a small research project for an MPhil in social work, in 1992. The premise for that research was that there is a process of transition as a practitioner moves to becoming a manager. My focus was to look at common features in this move and how the fifteen participants coped with and adapted to this change. This research showed that there is a path of transition and that each individual copes with the transition in their own unique way. Although I set this research aside, the knowledge that I gained and the issues of psychosocial transition continued to be an area about which I was curious. This experience and the way transition was conceptualised by these participants has stayed in my mind.

Whilst working as a social worker I retrained as a psychotherapist. This work brought me into contact with people whose lives were in flux and change: many in the midst of life changing transitions. Psychotherapy training brings with it critical reflection, a grounding in psychology and skills of interpretation.

In 2008 I made a professional transition, moving from being an independent psychotherapist to taking up a post within a university setting as a senior lecturer. My new desk was based alongside social work colleagues and I began to wonder about social work and how things might have changed in the years since I was last professionally involved. My colleagues were speaking about familiar issues:

finding placements, supervision, reflective practice, the issues and changes in the profession following policy and practice reviews. Supervision and reflective practice are important strands of my working life and it was apparent from my social work colleagues these were key principles that were embedded in their social work training programmes at all academic levels. How could I bring all these strands of my life and training into my research?

Psychologically and professionally I was in the midst of a major transition and I began to consider what it might be like for a student social worker making the transition from being a student to moving into practice for the first time. I had made this journey three decades earlier and retained fond memories of that time. My curious wondering transformed into a research proposal. I wanted to gain some insight into the transition experience of social work graduates leaving the university and entering social work as qualified practitioners. My initial overarching research question was how do they experience the transition they are making? I began to get excited by the possibility of making connection with, and exploring the experience of people graduating from social work training and taking their first qualified professional post in social work.

My thoughts and questions coalesced into the following research questions:

- What is the transition experience of the Newly Qualified Social Worker (NQSW) moving from being a student to their first qualified social work post?
- What place does reflective practice hold in the working practice of Newly Qualified Social Workers?
- What place does supervision have in the working life of a Newly Qualified Social Worker?

These three questions would enable me to explore the participants' experience of that transition, reflective practice and supervision, connecting me to their professional and personal journey in transition.

## 1.2. The process of transition.

The premise of this research is that there is a process of transition that takes place as individuals make a life change. This transition can take place within minutes or take months to process. My previous experience of looking at transition in a workplace was that there is a process that takes time, the amount of time varying from individual to individual and the environment in which they are placed. I needed to have a time frame in order to follow these participants and one which fitted with the time parameters of a part-time piece of Doctoral research. A year seemed to offer a significant block of time to follow the experience of participants as they moved into and settled in their new profession. Therefore I would consider the experience of social work graduates entering social work as qualified practitioners over a period of one year.

The academic papers that inform this research are from psychological studies, social work and organisational studies. The psychological studies focused on the individual experience of change, social work studies are concerned with all aspects of professional social work practice, and organisational studies consider effects of organisational changes. A broad definition of transition cited in studies of transition is the movement of a person from one stable state, through a period of being in an unknown situation, to passing through that to reach a second stable state. Erickson (1950), Parkes (1971), Golan (1981), Nicholson and West (1988), Bridges (2009) have all researched and modelled transition and all have argued that transition is a process which has physical, emotional, psychological and social aspects. These aspects will be present in the transition process as an individual moves from one stage to another in it. These models will be more fully discussed in chapter 2, part 1.

In this research, transition is conceptualised as moving from the first state of being a completing social work student to a second state of feeling competent in the role of a qualified social worker. At the outset of this study I did not know what changes and adaptations individual participants would be making. However, I am clear from previous research that there will be a process which will occur over time, which may include psychological, emotional and social elements that

together form a transition experience unique to each individual. This time frame for the process of transition will vary from person to person.

### 1.3. Research into social workers' practice

I have maintained an interest in the social work profession from my qualification as a social worker to the present and have noted the many shifts and changes that there have been. Change has been enshrined in legislation: The Children Act (1989); The Children Act (2004); The NHS and Community Care Act (1990) and The Mental Capacity Act (2005). At other times change has come following reviews of social work practice, most unfortunately in response to tragedies. Examples of these being Jasmine Beckford (1984) reviewed by Louis Bloom-Cooper, A Child in Trust (1984); Victoria Climbié (2000), reviewed by Lord Laming (2003); Peter Connelly (2007) reviewed by Lord Laming, The Protection of Children in England: A progress report (2009). In adult social care fundamental changes in practice followed the inquiry into the treatment of Christopher Clunis (Ritchie et al 1994), the death of Steven Hoskins (2007) and the enquiry into practice at Winterbourne View Hospital (2012). Each review has a list of recommendations which are delivered in a way that suggests that they will ensure that tragedies will never happen again.

Other types of reviews come from central and local government and are concerned about the quality of practice and often have a wider scope. Two reports commissioned by central government are the Social Work Reform Board (SWRB) (2010), and a progress report Building a Safe and Confident Future: Maintaining the Momentum (2012) and the Munro Review of Child Protection (2011), and the Munro Review of Child Protection: Progress Report: Moving to a Child Centred System (2012). These reports outlined what is seen as best practice by the profession.

One recommendation of the SWRB is a career pathway based on a Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) and an Assessed First Year in Employment (ASYE). This Assessed First Year in Employment came into operation in 2012. Prior to this social workers had a protected time in their first year which varied across employers; now all employers have given an undertaking to provide a

newly qualified social worker programme which is clearly placed in a Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) as advocated by the SWRB (2010). The Munro Review (2011) agrees with the PCF and the SWRB recommendations; however this report is primarily concerned with child care services and advocates major changes in the configuration of services and ways of organising social work practice. This could lead to the disruption of services as they are reconfigured in the light of recommendations. However, re-organisation appears to be a hallmark of social service delivery over the last 30 years.

Alongside these reports are research studies that focus on aspects of social work training and preparedness for practice. Marsh and Triseliotis (1996), Lyons (1999) Pithouse and Scourfield (2002), Lyons and Manion (2004), Brown et al (2007), Blewit and Tunstall (2008), Children's Workforce Development Committee (CWDC) (2009), Bradley (2008), Jack and Donnellan (2009), Healy et al (2009), Bates et al (2010), and Kearns and McArdle (2011), all consider the learning and development needs of newly qualified workers. Blewit and Tunstall (2008) and Children's Workforce Development Committee (CWDC) (2009) consider whether generic social work training produces child care workers with specific practice awareness and knowledge. These authors show some coherence in their recommendations and findings, particularly about the need for supervision, reflective practice and services which are client-focused.

My research is not primarily concerned with practice readiness; I am concerned to understand the experience that individuals have as they move from being a completing student social worker to being a qualified practitioner for the first time. Practice readiness is only one aspect of transition from university to the qualified practice environment of social work. Many researchers as highlighted above, for example Marsh and Triseliotis (1996), Lyons and Manion (2004), Bates et al (2010), have considered whether individuals are ready to practice at the level expected of newly qualified social workers. My interest is what is the experience of moving into practice for the first time as a qualified social worker? This includes the professional and personal aspects of that journey. The participants' experience of transition appears in the results chapter 4; vignettes of each participant also appear in this chapter. Tables of main themes emerging from the

data appear in their entirety in Appendix III and abstractions are in the main text. Case studies of each participant appear in Appendix IV and my results are discussed in chapter 5.

#### 1.4. The methodology

To reiterate, this research aims to uncover the experience of newly qualified social workers. At the outset I had no clear understanding of changes that might be experienced by the participants of this study. I do, however, expect there to be an experience of transition. The research focus was participants' experience and therefore I focused my methodological reading on literature concerning qualitative research. Being interested in experience of the practitioner in transition lends itself to a qualitative study and my chosen methodology being a phenomenological research study. My expectation at the outset was that the participants would tell me of their unfolding experience through a series of interviews. This would involve prolonged engagement with the participants as I look with them at the meaning they were making of their transition experience. I wanted to use a methodology that was not reductive of experience in seeking to find overarching principles that could be applied to all social workers in transition, but one which looked for divergence as well as convergence in the participants' experience.

As a senior lecturer in counselling I am familiar with many types of research methodology including Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). I concluded this methodology fitted with my need to find a way of researching experience which honours participants' experience and looks for both the convergent and the divergent data that emerges. Larkin, Watts and Clifton (2004) and Smith (2004) write of IPA as an integrative approach that uses analytic interpretation of participants' accounts. These interpretations may go beyond the meaning and thoughts that participants are making of their experience. IPA researchers have intense interaction with participant transcripts: each interview transcript being examined in depth before moving to the next transcript. For Smith (2009) the IPA researcher is empathetic and questioning, attempting to understand the experience from the participants place, prior to analysing, illuminating or interpreting the data.



Shinebourne (2011) states that IPA recognises the role of the researcher in making sense of the experience of the participants and that the researchers' role in the research should be transparent. Clarity of my role in the research is an important principle for me as a researcher. I am aware, as a social worker and psychotherapist, of the material, conscious and unconscious, that can get entangled in transactions between people. In this instance that is 'my' psychological material being enmeshed with that of the participant. I think that it is ethically important for me as a researcher to own this possibility and where possible make this material explicit and consider how my process can be affecting the analysis of the data drawn from the participants' experience. To help me with this processing I used a technique called 'bracketing' to assist in unravelling some of the metaphoric 'balls of wool'. Bracketing relies on the researcher taking time to reflect on, record and bracket issues and preconceptions about the research which might affect the research process by influencing interpretations of the data. This reflection and bracketing is seen by Smith (2009) as an integral part of the research process. Smith contends that it may not be possible to know in advance which part of one's preconceptions may be relevant in the specific situation, and preconceptions themselves change in the process of interpretation. Smith also warns that bracketing is not an end in itself but rather is part of reflective process and is not more significant than the experience of the participants who should remain the central focus of the research. In my early deliberations I did discuss my evolving thoughts with individuals who had known me as a social worker and they helped me reconnect to the experience that I had had. These discussions formed the basis of my reflections and initial bracketing.

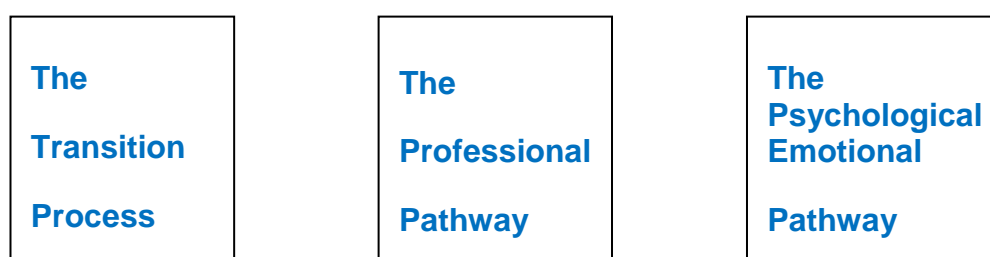
I was aware that having been a social work practitioner, having enjoyed my training and feeling that I had had a good experience of moving into qualified practice, that it would be important to note and bracket all these details so that when I was undertaking data analysis I could return to them and consider whether my bias affected my interpretations. This bracketing narrative acts as both a quality and validity check, showing the pathway of my thinking through the research decision making process. My expectation was to be transparent with the

readers of the research and that if bias has crept in it is clear in the research trail. My discussion of my experience of using IPA appears in chapter 6.

### 1.5. Weaving the strands together: A conceptual framework

At the outset of this research study I wanted to be informed by the experience of newly qualified practitioners over time rather than pre-judge that experience. However, in conceptualising the work there are several strands which will be explored through the academic literature by way of a literature review and methodological review: the first being the process of transition which will include social, emotional and psychological components, this appears in chapter 2, part 1; the second being the context of professional social work, this appears in chapter 2, part 2; and thirdly Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), which appears in chapter 3. The three strands: the transition process, the professional journey and the psychological/emotional journey are seen as working together over time to offer framework for the exploration of the overall journey of transition. I will research this within a timeframe of their first year of practice. Below is a pictorial representation of this framework.

#### **Conceptual Framework: Three strands of experience**



**These three strands of experience form a journey of transition over time from the completion of social work training to end of the first year as a qualified social worker.**

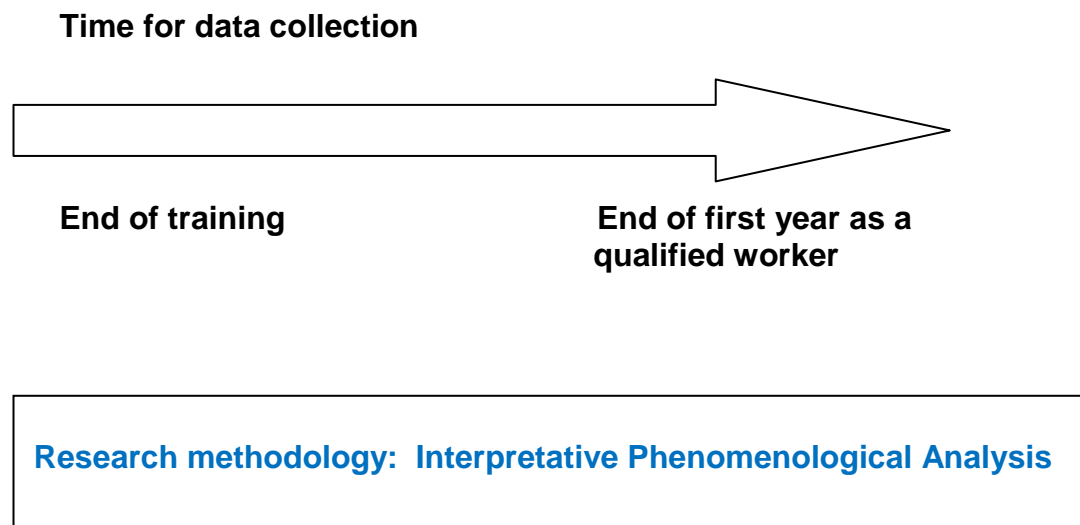


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

#### 1.6. Originality and contribution to knowledge

This thesis adds to new knowledge in three ways: Firstly, as a contribution to understanding the needs of newly qualified social workers, which may assist university training to focus attention on the implications of transition for graduating students; secondly to assist employers to look at the needs of their newly qualified staff; and thirdly, it contributes to the knowledge of interpretative phenomenology analysis as a methodology for research in the social care arena.

My study will look at both child-care and adult service workers and is not concerned solely with matters of practice readiness; therefore this will be an original contribution to informing social work employers and university educators of the issues that arise, based on the experience of those who move into their first qualified social work post.

In a keyword search, taking a time frame of 2000-2012, using terms transition and employment, transition and social work, social work and first employment, transition and graduates, social work students' first job and transition, no article or book exactly fitted the scope of my research. I adjusted these words in repeated

searches, widening the scope to include comparable studies in other professions. Published reference sources were identified through text searches of electronic bibliographic databases, social work and research journals. Databases used included EBSCO, JSTOR, Academic Onefile, Social Science Abstracts, ProQuest. Other material was retrieved through reference harvesting and internet searches for example using Google Scholar.

The types of study relating to transition that I did find were focused on young people leaving home, leaving the care system and those going to college for the first time. There is literature which focuses on the transition experience of graduates leaving university; however this is not focused on one professional group and social work is not specifically mentioned. Moreover the people identified in the studies are in their early 20's; the demographic of social work graduates is chronologically older than this and for many social work graduates this is a change of profession marking the end of a second degree programme. Moriarty and Manthorpe (2013), who undertook a scoping review in 2011, found consensus in research studies examining the lack of basic skills that newly qualified workers had. Although basic skills are important to the newly qualified social worker's journey, the basic skills of newly qualified social workers is not my primary concern.

There have been few recent psychological studies of transition, other than in for life-stage transition and organisational transition. Life stage transition is that body of work dedicated to understanding the stages of development, physical, psychological and social, that human beings go through during their life span. This work is exemplified by Erickson (1950), whose work forms the basis of understanding this process and has been used in recent research projects, for example Murphy et al (2010). Murphy et al considered the transition of college students to the workplace but here the focus was on the emerging young adult. Organisational studies that use transition models are usually used to look at change management within a large organisation - the management of change within staff groups and teams. Bridges (2009) argues that there are three phases in transition in an organisational context and his work has been adapted by Dima and Skehill (2011) to offer a theoretical structure for considering the psycho-social

processes involved in the transitions that young people make when leaving the care system.

I was interested to see if there is a common process of transition that can be discerned from the experience of individuals who are all undergoing a transition experience, all having completed social work training at one higher education centre. At the beginning of the study I chose not to take one model of transition and apply this to the experience of my sample of participants I wanted to look at the experience of participants and consider if a model would emerge from the data. There are no studies constructed in the same way as mine and therefore there are no exact comparisons to draw on. My original contribution is to offer a model based on the experience of the sample of participants and the meaning that those individuals are making of that experience. This research will be informative to educators and employers and will lead to greater awareness in the profession about the needs of newly qualified workers, offering potential scope for further collaboration between employers and universities. The data will be available to newly qualified social workers through future publications and may help them to understand some of their own experiences.

IPA is a more recent research methodology which emerged in the 1990s. The concentration of studies using IPA are in health psychology, therefore most studies are health-focused. I am using the methodology to explore experience in a profession outside health care. Therefore I am moving the use of this research methodology out of purely psychological or health research and into a more sociologically-based sphere of research. This might therefore introduce the methodology to a group of people who may not have heard of it and possibly foster interest in others using it in social care settings. I am demonstrating the flexibility of the methodology as a research tool outside the fields of health and psychology.

### 1.7. Plan of the thesis

The plan of this thesis is based on considering all aspects of transition of a graduate social worker as they enter the workplace as a newly qualified social

work practitioner. I follow that experience over one year. This chapter 1 offered a broad overview of my research and conceptual framework. Chapter 2 contains the literature review and is broken into three parts the first is concerned with transition, part two looks at the context of social work, and the third part is focused on supervision, reflective practice and well-being. Chapter 3 considers the methodology of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and the application of IPA in this research. I draw on available accounts of how this methodology has been previously used alongside the philosophical and ethical roots of IPA.

Chapter 4 gives an analysis of the data and can be read alongside the case studies of participants that appear in Appendix IV and Tables 1-6 that appear as Appendix III. The case studies and Tables offer the opportunity to understand each individual's journey whilst chapter 4 offers a composite analysis. The results offer my analysis of the data and textual excerpts from the participant transcripts which set the participants' material at the heart of the analysis.

Chapters 5 and 6 offer discussions of the findings with regard to transition and the methodology. The discussion of transition in chapter 5 has three parts: Part one considers an emerging model of the process of transition; part two focuses on aspects of the psychological/emotional journey made by participants in the first year of practice; part three outlines the professional journey of these newly qualified practitioners. Chapter 6 is a discussion of the methodology including my thoughts about bracketing, reflexivity and reflection. The final chapter 7 considers my conclusions and recommendations for practice, education, employers and for further research.

## **Chapter 2: Literature review**

### **Introduction**

The research questions that I posed are:

- What is the transition experience of the Newly Qualified Social Worker (NQSW) moving from being a student to their first qualified social work post?
- What place does reflective practice hold in the working practice of Newly Qualified Social Workers?
- What place does supervision have in the working life of a Newly Qualified Social Worker?

The newly qualified social worker's story from qualification to gaining their first qualified post, in the timeframe of one year, covers a wide canvas in the literature.

This literature review has three sections. Part one will consider transition from a variety of perspectives found in theoretical literature. Part two focuses on the environment of the NQSW, the context in which social workers practice, considering policy and legislative changes which affect practice in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This section also looks at the development of the social work professional. The final section, part three, is concerned with two key components of social work practice, supervision and reflective practice and how these contribute to the well-being of the newly qualified social worker.

### **Part 1: Transition**

This research is concerned with the nature of transition. What is transition? What are its components in relation to social work practitioners? How is the transition of social work practitioner being experienced as they leave university and take their first qualified practitioner post?

## 2.1 Concept of transition

Transition can be viewed from a number of theoretical perspectives and frameworks: for example, life stages, psychodynamic models, role theory, transition curve framework and narrative disruption. What these studies have in common is that they focus on major life change and/or crisis in the development of that individual. Transition is cited in theoretical studies, for example, Erickson (1950), Parkes (1971), Golan (1981), Nicholson and West (1988), Bridges (2009), as being the movement between two stable states. In the case of this research, from the first state of being a completing social work student to a second state of being a qualified social work practitioner in their first job.

From a theoretical perspective it is commonly held that transition is a process which has physical, emotional, psychological and social aspects, Erickson (1950); Parkes (1971); Golan (1981); Nicholson and West (1988); and Bridges (2009) all contribute to this notion of the transition process. Physical, emotional, psychological and social aspects all inform what occurs as an individual moves from one stage to another in the transition process. Psychological, social and emotional adaption to these changes is necessary. The changes within the transition process therefore need to be considered from a psychological, social and employment basis as all these will inform the individual experience of transition.

## 2.2 Life stage and life course transition

Over a life span individuals experience different life transitions which vary in their impact. These can be changes that occur intra-personally, the individual's inner psychological journey, or inter-personally, that is in connection with or to other people or in relation to the environment.

Erickson (1950), who has been particularly influential in the field, argued that a life stage transition is defined as tasks and undertakings that the individual needs to perform in order to successfully negotiate different kinds of personal and emotional issues at different life stages. Erickson (1950) describes eight stages of



human development, eight ages of man. Each stage has a set of psychological tasks and understandings which the individual needs to engage with and work through. These developmental stages enable personal growth and understanding of the society to which the individual belongs. The first three stages are concerned with the development of the child and include the different developmental transitions to be negotiated: for example, learning to walk and the difference that makes to the child's world view alongside the moral learning that the child makes. Erickson describes this as autonomy versus shame and doubt. The next stages concern pre-adolescence and adolescence. Adolescence is when the individual is pre-occupied with a search for identity in the social world; it is "a psycho-social stage between child and adulthood and between the moralities learned by the child and the ethics to be developed by the adult" (Erickson, *ibid*, p.254). Roles can be confusing. This role confusion prompts the individual search for "social values which guide identity" (Erickson, *ibid*, p.254). The last three stages are concerned with young adulthood, adulthood and maturity. Young adulthood is concerned with the search for intimacy. These transitions are not about individual physical developmental issues, but concern finding a role in society and becoming more aware of self as a unique individual.

Erickson (1987) furthered his work and his model, including that, developmentally, transition is modified by different life conditions and previous experience. All transitions are not undertaken or experienced in a vacuum. Society and culture affect the transition as does a specific historical moment, for example a global financial recession.

There are critics of this model. One is Carol Gilligan (1982), who argues that Erickson developed his model from a masculine perspective. Therefore it is not a holistic model of life stage development that can be applied to the whole population, it is masculine biased. This may well be true, given the historical context of the model's development in the late 1940s. From a feminist perspective Sommers (2001) argues there is no difference between genders in the sphere of moral development, which is part of Erickson's theory and Gilligan's critique. However the usefulness of this model to my research is not based on the exact steps of development that he found, but in the conceptualisation that

psychological development has stages and stages enable individuals to map experience over time. In the case of my research these experiences are psychological, emotional and social changes taking place over a specific time frame of the first year of practice as a qualified practitioner.

Colyer (2008) describes a psychosocial transition as characterised or revealed through language and behaviours that demonstrate anxiety, disaffection, defensiveness, hostility and anger. This gives a sense of a transition not being rigidly focused on chronological change and that transition can be seen as being revealed in emotional behaviour. This is important and can be related to a variety of social situations, for example taking a new job and getting to know the new context. Aspects of this experience may not be how the individual in transition envisaged the process or the job, which can lead to negative emotions being experienced.

Sugarman (2010) develops Erickson's (1950) idea of a life stage transition but does not use the concept of life stage development as a way of describing the chronological development of an individual, defining life course transitions as "the rhythmic fluctuations and patterns of human life over time marked by expected and unexpected life events and by interactions between the self and environment" (p.284). Using this definition the transition from being a university student to taking a job as a qualified social worker is one such life event. Each life event brings with it both losses and gains. Transition affects the individual's intellectual, social, career and family life. Each aspect of transition has its own rate or pace of change. Therefore the experience of each individual and the meaning which is made of phases of transition will be different.

Murphy et al (2010) conducted a study in America which took Erickson's statement concerning the emergence of young people into the world of work and applied the life transitions of young people leaving college and transitioning to work. Erikson stated that "it is primarily the inability to settle on an occupational identity which disturbs young people" (p.263). Murphy et al (2010) studied the emergence of 10 young people transitioning from college into a career. The sample was drawn from individuals within their first three years following

graduation from college. The sample population were either known to the researchers or recruited via a “snowball technique”, that is one participant leading to another. Murphy et al (2010) looked at the psycho-social issues of leaving college, emphasising the emerging adult. The study considers the issues that disturb young people most and found not being able to settle into an occupational identity as being most important. The findings also highlight “the importance of social support and continuous optimism in the face of difficult transitions, unfilled expectations and overall dissatisfaction with one’s life circumstances” (Murphy, et al. p.181), and include “the importance of expectations and how these expectations may mediate well-being during the emerging adult’s transition to the world of work” (Murphy et al *ibid*, p.181). This was a small self-selected sample and the participants were involved in a range of careers, all having had different college experiences. The important finding was in relation to social support leading to a smoother transition experience, as far as my research is concerned. The small sample size and variety of jobs and experiences the participants had makes generalisation difficult and the researchers found that a longitudinal study was indicated to further understanding.

My study does not look at emerging adults as the sample includes mature students. However they all do have expectations and are in the process of transition from a place of study to a career. Therefore I would expect to find some similarities in the issues present within transition.

Applying Erickson’s model offers a framework for considering life stage development. My research is not looking at human development chronologically but psychologically. The developmental issues of the newly qualified social worker are similar to those of the college students in Murphy’s study. The individuals in my sample have undergone intensive training and have been assessed and qualified as social workers. They are emerging into practice as a qualified worker with their own expectations of what this means. They need to create their professional identity in their new role not dissimilarly to the adolescent emerging into a world of work. There is an identity to be carved and created and there is potential for role confusion, particularly in this period of transition. The emerging new social worker may have questions concerning their new role: for example,

who am I in this new role? What is my ethical stance as a new worker? Whom am I guided by? What are the implications of my culture on my work?

### 2.3 Psychodynamic literature: Definitions and descriptors

There are some classic psychodynamic texts which offer descriptions and definitions of the process of transition. Tynhurst (1957) notes that the movement from one state to another is a change process, not a jump from one state, stage or circumstances to another but a process. Caplan (1964) and Cummings (1966) found similar patterns with regard to transitional points, which include psychological turmoil, aimless activity, disturbances in bodily and mood function. These states are brought about as the existing coping patterns and defence mechanisms of the individual do not fit the new situation. A process of transition does not fit with patterns that the individual had developed to deal with the world both psychologically and socially before this period of transition. Adams et al (1976) state that for an experience to be classed as a transition the individual needs to have some awareness of personal discontinuity. Individuals need to be aware that a personal change has taken place and because of this change a different set of behaviours are required to deal with the new situation.

Caplan (1964); Cummings (1966); Parkes (1971); Golan (1981); describe not just a process of transition as being from stability through instability to stability again but one in which the individual experiences gains and losses. Each point of change gives an opportunity to move forward and offers potential growth. The person can remain in the confusion and chaos of the unstable state, the place of uncertainty, or they can take a backward step. Staying with the unknown or going backwards would be to fight against change and maybe result in regressive behaviour. Golan (1981) points to transitions having a wide scope: one transition could be sudden and dramatic, another being gradual and barely perceptible. He goes further to describe this process of transitional change as an interval of uncertainty and change. These transitions have a varying impact on the life of the individual but all require some degree of change, transformation and adaption. Transition is therefore the bridge between two states, old and stable and new and unknown. Parkes (1971) and Golan (1981) suggest that there are common

features in transition. Feelings of anxiety, loss, and disorientation require an adaption to this new state and a reorganisation of inner and outer behaviours, thinking and feeling. Golan (*ibid*) has characterised the experience of transition as being marked by changes in perception and cognition, emotions of confusion and disorientation, with feelings of ambivalence and the search for signs to help guide us through this unfamiliar terrain. Figure 2 below is a simple model which outlines an area of transition which is the focus of this research.

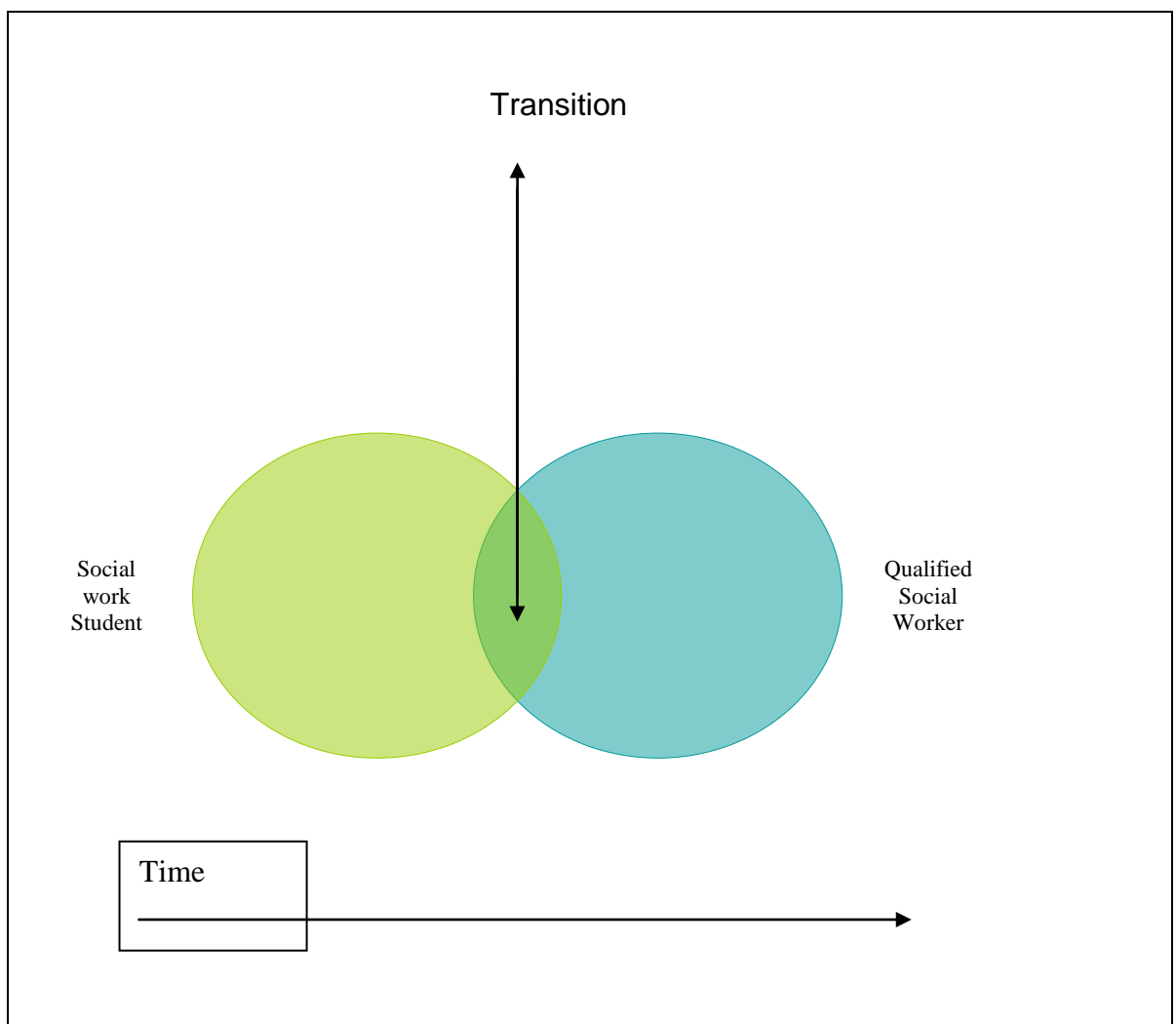


Figure 2: Ideal model of transition

The notion of “process” surrounding transition is important. Indeed, even if a change is very fast there is the awareness to the individual that something has changed. An example of this would be an unexpected change in the work environment, like a re-organisation’s with the possibility of redundancy or re-

location. The individual has their own unique experience of change which is influenced by the wider context in which the change is made. As such each individual in my sample population will have an individual experience of transition, some of which may share similarities with the experience of others and some of which may be very different.

My research looking at transition experience over a period of time, one year, will offer some understanding of the process of transition for a small group of participants. This includes gaining some insight into their inner psychological processes. Moving from being a completing student into a first post as a qualified social worker is an unknown path for the research participants. They have some familiarity with social work and social work organisations through their training and professional placement experience. In placements student social workers will have met, talked and in many cases worked alongside qualified social workers. Some members of the sample have had previous experience in practising social work as unqualified workers. But this experience is not that of being a qualified practitioner for the first time.

### 2.3.1 Psycho-social transition and assumptive worlds.

A further way of conceptualising transition is to consider psychological processes which are affected by change; this moves the arena of study from the outer world, the world of work for example and what happens there, to consider the inner psychological world of the individual. Parkes (1971) drew on his own observational studies at the Tavistock Institute London and described psycho-social transition. Parkes built on the theoretical work of Bowlby (1969), which was based on the observation of mothers and babies and concerns attachment. Bowlby (*ibid*) described a model of secure attachment, a sense of the world as a safe and secure place able to meet individual needs. He developed the idea that individuals need a safe base from which they can explore and take risks, arguing that individuals do best if they know there is a safe place to return to if the world gets psychologically overwhelming. This notion is similar to Winnicott's (1973) view of a facilitating environment. Youll and McCourt-Perring (1993) describe this as a way of offering individuals, in this case social work practitioners, an

opportunity to move out from this base, and feel safe and secure in doing so in the knowledge that they can return to the base if they need support. This sense of a safe base assumes that there will be capacity in the environment for nurture and growth and that the environment can adapt and change alongside the individual. Youll (1985) had previously described individuals as deploying their talents best when they have trusted persons offering support should the need arise.

At a time of moving from being a student to a qualified worker post, this safe base might be might be a friend, partner or mentor. Further, Bowlby (1969) argued that babies and children have a working model of the world internally, a psychological model. This model is unique to the individual. Loss can threaten this structure and therefore an early individual task is learning to accommodate loss into this inner working model. This could also be seen as moving from an individual to a more systems level of functioning.

Parkes (1971) extended Bowlby's model describing the inner world of the individual as an assumptive world. "It is the only world we know and it includes everything we know or think we know. It includes interpretation of the past and our expectations of the future, our plans and our prejudices" (p.103).Threatened changes to this assumptive world can lead to disorientation and resistance to change. Here, when the usual interpretable and predictable world is removed, loss, disorientation, mourning and grieving follow. Parkes (1971) argues that for a new order to be established there needs to be new meaning and new predictability in both inner and outer environments. A prerequisite for a successful transition is for the individuals' inner and outer world to accommodate shifts in identity and role. This requires shifts and changes to the individual's assumptive world. However there is always the unpredictability of the individual and their other life experiences which will come into play as the transition is made.

Although this model was developed to describe the psychological development of individuals, the notion of an assumptive world can be applied throughout a person's life. A new job, a new career is seen as exciting and a challenge, satisfying financial and social needs. There is also potential for disruption and change to routine and social and familial relationships. Predictable patterns

dissolve, relationships change. These losses may be mourned. To accommodate the change the individual disengages from the old and engages with the new, that is, formulating new structures and patterns to make meaning of their world.

Each participant has experience of a professional training. Training can potentially ease the transition, meaning that the transition is experienced as a more minor change in their assumptive world, possibly a more comfortable change than a major, radical change. This is because in the course of professional training the student social worker begins to adapt to the role of social worker through both the university teaching and feedback they receive and the professional placements they undertake as part of the qualification process. This allows adaptations to take place in their assumptive world. Below 2.3.2 explores that notion again in relation to transitional objects.

### 2.3.2 Transitional objects

Having considered what a transition is, it is important to consider how people cope with change and what needs to be in place for them to make a successful transition. In the field of object relations transitional objects/phenomena are seen as important in times of uncertainty. Winnicott (1973) has written extensively on this subject. His work is based on mother and baby studies but can be and has been extrapolated to wider fields. Winnicott describes a transitional object or phenomenon as something that is associated with a positive experience. A soothing and secure experience can be offered by the object or phenomenon when there are difficult or frightening issues to be tackled. The external object has become internally meaningful; an example maybe a stuffed toy, a tune, a person, anything that provides a reliable soothing experience.

Pedler et al (2006) in work related to organisational management refers not to transitional objects but to anchors and zones of stability. These anchors or zones of stability can be “more or less any element within a person’s life space” (p.90). This could include for example a person, an activity, ideas, value, places and belongings. These items bring security and comfort in times of change.



Winnicott (1973) and Pedler et al (2006) agree the essence of their concepts is having a secure item to hold on to in a time of uncertainty. In the context of this research the transitional objects may be knowledge or skills gained in training, experience or a mentor with whom the individual has been familiar during their training at the university or on placement. That is something or someone who can be relied upon when everything around them is in the process of transition and transformation.

### 2.3.3 Loss

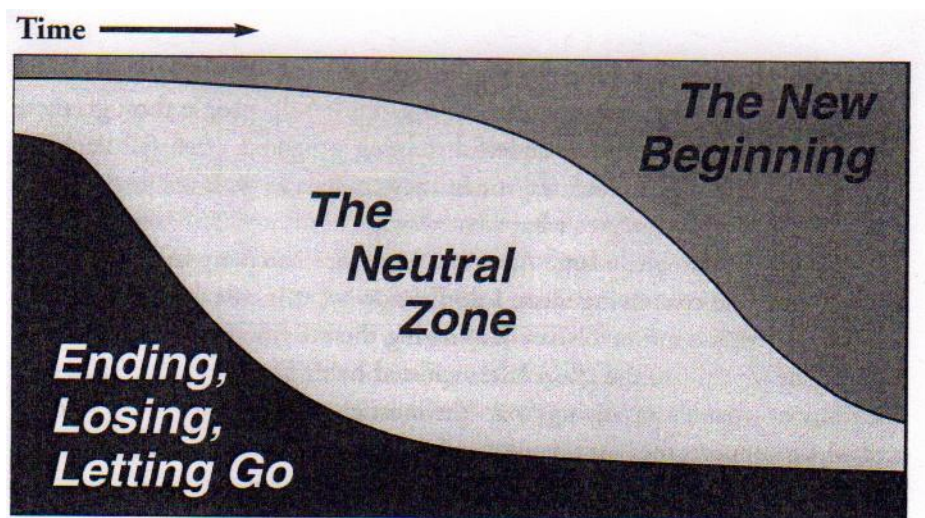
The psychodynamic literature does emphasis that there are losses and gains to be reaped from every transition. Parkes (1971, 1991) describes an on-going flux of life where individuals undergo many changes “every change involves a loss and a gain...in all situations the individual is faced with the need to give up one mode of life and accept another” (p.102). Every change an individual makes contains a process, part of which is experiencing loss for the part which has been left behind or given up. Each loss is grieved for. Worden (2003) considered loss through human bereavement studies, showing loss of a loved person to be unsettling to a person’s psychological and social identity. This can cause anxiety, distress, uncertainty and fearfulness and can be expressed through anger, hostility, defensiveness, pining and guilt. Worden (2003) goes on to describe four stages of adjustment and adaption. Stage one is accepting the loss, which moves on to stage two working through the pain of grief that follows loss. The third stage is re-engaging with the world and finally investing in a new relationship, detaching from the deceased and locating that experience in the individual’s past.

These stages are observable patterns in normal grief but are not sequential or time limited. Through research and the application of Worden’s model (*ibid*) to organisations, Colyer (2008) argues that these patterns can be extended to any experience of significant loss: for example, when an individual experiences role or organisational change.

William and Susan Bridges (2009) writing about organisational change and the transition process argue that change is situational, a move from one place to

another, transition is psychological, a process that individuals move through. Three phases are depicted, see Figure 3 below. First is letting go of the old, which is centred on loss and endings. This phase is followed by a neutral zone where things are unknown and uncertain, maybe confusing and chaotic. In the final stage a new beginning is made, with a new structure coming into place. This work has been adapted by Dima and Skehill (2011) to offer a theoretical structure for considering the psycho-social processes involved in the transitions that young people make when leaving the care system.

Figure 3: Bridges' Model of Organisational Transition (2009)



At the beginning of my research the participants were at the stage of letting go and ending their university experience. This is the stage that students were at when they agreed to take part in the research. They had completed their training but had not begun work or were just beginning work post qualification. They are leaving the university and their role as a student social worker behind them. There were some losses associated with this; in particular peers and friends moving on, and the familiar environment and staff in the form of the university campus, teachers, placements, and placement colleagues and mentors. Their journey therefore beginning with loss and the new patterns and structures of their first professional qualified post are as yet unknown or newly in place. They are, in Bridges' words, experiencing endings and letting go and moving into the neutral zone.

## 2.4 Role theory

In transition between university and working as a qualified social worker, the individual concerned will have to cope with a change in how they are perceived within the profession. That is, moving from the role of student social worker with which they are familiar to qualified social worker. A way of conceptualising this move is through role theory. This is a term used in sociology, anthropology and social psychology. Role represents a pattern or set of assumptions about the social behaviour demanded and expected by others. Role can be ascribed by your position in an organisation or situation, for example manager or receptionist, or it can be cultural, like a vicar or teacher. There are also personal or family roles like an auntie or friend. Linton (1945), Merton (1957) and Sarbin and Allen (1968) all give slightly different accounts of role theory but share basic concepts. For them all, role defines social location, behaviour and makes reference to expectations, rights, duties, privileges and obligations. Roles are not in isolation. They are part of a group process. Each role has sets of behaviour that is expected from the individual in that position.

Merton (*ibid*) argues that a role set is the complement of role relationships which individuals have by virtue of occupying a particular position of status. Members of a role set have differing expectations of the individual occupying a particular role. Handy (1993) states roles “provide categories into which we can fit data about people and make some assumptions” (p.93). For example, a student social worker attracts different sets of expectations from student colleagues, their placement manager, their tutor, their practice teacher, their supervisor, their team manager, stakeholder in other agencies and service users.

Biddle (1986) argues that role conflicts stem from varying expectations which are incompatible. This can be characterised by role overload and role ambiguity. Role overload occurs when there are too many expectations faced by the person. An example of role overload is when a person is trying to balance work and home life, the roles of mother, partner, and manager not fitting together. Biddle (*ibid*) continues that role ambiguity is where there are unclear expectations, making it impossible for the role holder to adjust to all the demands. There may also be

discrepancies between what is expected and the information available for the person to do the tasks asked of them.

Nicholson and West (1988) have taken role theory and developed a model which takes account of the process of work role transition. Work role transition is the move from being a student to becoming a qualified practitioner. The model Nicholson and West (*ibid*) espouse has four stages: these are preparation, encounter, adjustment and stabilisation. The preparation stage is concerned with looking forward and anticipating change. This stage includes skills and knowledge development in order to be able to apply for a job. The second stage, encounter, is moving into the post that you have found. This stage is characterised by stress and excitement, optimism, discovery and a reality shock. That is real and acute awareness of the job to be done and all that this means. Adjustment concerns the personal change that is necessary to take on the new role requirements. The final stage of stabilisation is when the individual feels in control of their situation and begin to look at aspects of their future within the post. An understanding of this cycle can offer the individual a way of seeing transition as a part of the process of becoming a professional and each subsequent transition might follow a similar path. Accommodation and adaption are themes common to Nicholson and West's (*ibid*) model.

The role of the newly qualified social worker needs to be clear, and the changes from being a student practitioner clearly delineated if the newly qualified practitioner is to make a smooth transition from being a student. For example, using the Nicholson and West model, personal adjustment to a new role cannot take place if there is no clarity about the role and the expectations of those in contact with or supporting that role. For the purpose of this research the change of role for the individual is from that of student to newly qualified worker. Most social work roles are located in an organisation usually with a hierarchical structure. The role will be associated with an identified social position and with a set of expectations from other members of the organisation and wider community. The way in which individuals respond to these expectations will be influenced by both official demands of the organisation and pressure from informal groups of colleagues. The role set of the newly qualified social worker may be ambiguous

and contain conflicting expectations. Aspects of being newly qualified are explored below in part 2 of this literature review.

## 2.5 Transitions curve framework.

The transition curve model of transition conceptualises the psychological/emotional stages during a process of transition. Unlike Erickson this is not based on life stages but phases or stages within the process of a transition. Hopson et al (1988) and Sugarman (2010) offer frameworks for looking at transition. Both see that a person in transition has to make a series of adjustments and changes as they enter a transition process. Hopson et al (*ibid*) have constructed a four-phase model of transition and believe that even if the transition is planned the stages will be experienced, though the intensity of the first phase may be lessened. The first phase in the process is unfamiliarity due to the newness of the transition state and the degree of negative expectation of transition that the individual holds. Shock would characterise this stage and may be exhibited as excitement or numbness. If the individual holds a positive expectation of the transition process, shock and immobilisation is felt less intensely. Provisional adjustment or the honeymoon period follows this and can include denial of the disruption caused by any change. Denial in this context is giving a time of respite from the reality shock of the new. Gradual loss of confidence and increased sense of depression occurs as a consequence of facing up to the reality of the change that is underway. A crisis point is reached and there is a sense of despair and hopelessness. The last phase of the model is acceptance, unhooking from the past. This has to be negotiated and failure here will result in no forward movement. Finally by accepting and embracing the new situation the individual can begin to make meaning which will become internalised as the transition is complete.

Making a transition necessitates change in the individual and accommodations to the new order. This is not always a happy experience and, as is noted by Bridges (2009), the losses and gains form part of a transition process, although loss is not all there is. Transition is the process by which when an old and understood place is given up or moved on from; there will be change, the giving up of an old pattern

to make room for a new. This giving up is a loss and within it there may be a gain but in the moment the loss is experienced. All of the above models suggest a pattern of transition; however all acknowledge that the linear path is not smooth, containing the possibility of progression and regression.

## 2.6 Narrative analysis and narrative disruption

An alternative way of considering transition is to look at the stories that people tell of their experience and the meaning that they are making about these stories. Narrative analysis is a social science research method which has as its focus the stories that people weave and that the stories which are told about a life event give information and insight into the individual's life, and identity. The importance of this area to my research is that I am asking participants to share their experience and therefore their stories of transition. Sarbin (1986) argues that people live and make sense of their world through the stories that they tell. Wetz and Charmaz (2011) state that narrative analysis looks at each story as being relative to the individual and that there is no one truth but multiple truths. Here I am using narrative analysis as a concept and not a research method. It is the concept of story-telling and meaning making that is important to this research study. If I as a researcher ask a series of individuals about their story in relation to a particular event, for example a role transition, I will receive many accounts of one event. Narrative analysis is concerned with how events are understood and organised by the participants. Smith and Sparkes (2006) consider the field of narrative research and find that although there is much accord with a broad consensus that narratives are important in the construction of identity and sense of self, the concept of narrative identity means different things to different scholars.

Many researchers in this field, as cited by Smith and Sparkes (2008), James (1963), Erickson (1963) and McAdams (2006) look in-depth at the issues of developing an identity "I" by contrast to self-hood. This is not the focus of this research. However I am concerned with the disruption to an individual's narrative or life story as they make a transition, in this case from university training to being a professionally qualified social worker. It is from narrative that we create and

maintain our personal identity. Individuals are known to others through stories. Each of us has a narrative life script from which we live our lives; these scripts are therefore precious and help form our identity, how we are and are known in the world. A major disruption to the flow of the story has a destabilising effect. An example of this would be a script disrupted by serious illness. A person who has been a carer all their life, needing care not planned for means that their story has to be re-shaped. No longer for example is the nurse able to continue as a caring professional and has to move to the one being cared for. This can create narrative chaos and a new plot line must be formed. In my research participants may or may not experience a narrative disruption but they do have to find a way to begin their narrative as a qualified practitioner. Their professional identity is no longer that of an unqualified student social worker but now as a qualified worker with all the expectations that come with that. My research is looking at the story that people tell about their experience, whether their personal narrative is disrupted or not.

## 2.7 Sociological and anthropological perspective

Sociologists and anthropologists have looked at the macro level of transition. Mead (1928) looked at the rites of passage of those crossing the child to adult threshold. Mead (*ibid*) considered the cultural functions of these rites of passage in passing on norms of behaviour. This systems view is concerned with individuals making a niche for themselves in the world. Niches include personal relationships. This would be a mixture of family, friends, and work colleagues. Alongside this is the set of stories that they live within. These will reflect not only familiar family patterns but also cultural myths. Meaning also comes from an individual's belongings, objects and spaces. McLeod (2011) would suggest that creating a niche is part of the transitional task. It "requires deciding what parts of the old niche can be retained and which need to be left behind" (p.263).

Sociological studies define transition more in terms of social thresholds and social roles; for example, finishing full time education, leaving home, marriage, and parenthood. Jones and Wallace (1992) summed up these transitions as the acquisition of citizenship. The process of transition is affected by a range of

variables including social class, gender, ethnicity, disability, geographical location. Other studies for example Stein and Munro (2008) or Anghel (2011) look at the transition experience of children in public care as they leave care and move into adulthood. Both studies consider the wider political and financial context of children crossing this threshold. The importance of such approaches is to reiterate that the wider political, social and financial context does affect transition.

My study is not looking at class, gender, ethnicity or disability with regard to transition, but individual experience of a particular transition. As with a sociological study, a range of factors will affect an individual's transition into their first job as a qualified social worker. I am interested in their experience and how this experience impacts individuals and how they articulate their experience.

## 2.8 Stages of transition over a career.

An alternative way of conceptualising transition of the newly qualified social worker is to consider professional development over time. There are no studies that particularly focus on social work but there are studies which relate to allied professions, for example Benner (1984) based in nursing, Friedman and Kaslow (1986), Ronnestad and Skovholt (2003) in counselling.

Benner (1984) states that the developing nursing practitioner goes through or can possibly go through five levels of development from novice to expert. Each level reflects different levels of performance. Novice is the beginning where the practitioner is rule orientated. Their understanding of the work has been gained from textbooks and student training but they have little practice experience to draw on. Advance beginner is an individual who has some experience and recognises the task to be done. A competent nurse is at level three with some 2-3 years in the profession and someone who sees beyond their task to the long term goal. The proficient level is when the person can see the whole, understands what might typically occur, and recognises when this does not happen. Expert is the level where there is no longer reliance on the analytic principle; the person has an intuitive grasp of the total situation.



Friedman and Kaslow (1986) looked at the development of a counsellor over time. This is a six stage model and the first stage is before you begin work and is typified by excitement and anticipatory anxiety. Stage 2 concerns the individual's lack of knowledge, skill and confidence. The worker wants to hide this from their manager/supervisor as they do not want to be seen as incompetent. Supervision at this stage is focused on the client, not the relationship between the counsellor and the client. At stage 3 the counsellor realises that they do make a difference to the client; this allows an increase in the use of skills and strategies. Enthusiasm and issues might well spill over into family and friendship groups. The worker still has some dependency needs on their supervisor but also needs some autonomy in their client work. Stage 4 is about making active connections with theory and making connections from theory to practice. The worker begins to identify their own way of working. The supervisor moves from teacher to more of a consultant and engages the counsellor in a higher degree of challenge. By stage 5 the worker has a clearer identity and independence of action: advice given is considered but not always accepted. The final stage 6 is when the counsellor has a firm sense of professional identity and belief in his/her competence, the phrase used to identify this stage is calm and collegial in relation to supervision.

Ronnestad and Skovholt (2003) in a research study based on counsellors, proposed a six phase model of professional development. This begins at the pre-training phase and is characterised by the "lay helper", someone who "feels natural/authentic when helping" (p.10). Phase 2 is the beginning of training, all is exciting and challenging. Students become overwhelmed by theories, clients and the general context of the work. Dependency and vulnerability make students appreciative of advice and support. Typically students feel threatened and anxious during training. Phase 3: Advanced student aspirations are high, individuals have high expectations of themselves and do not want to make mistakes, they often act in a cautious, conservative fashion feeling excessive levels of responsibility. Phase 4 is the "Novice Professional" (p.17), years 1-5 approximately after graduation. There is a sense of being on one's own. Alongside this is the experience of a continual process of reformulation, "shedding and adding" at both conceptual and behavioural levels. Phase 5 follows years of experience and here the worker finds a job placement that is highly congruent with the individuals'

values, interests and attitudes. Finally, Phase 6, the well-established professional and regarded as senior by others possibly after 20-30 years.

Ronnestad and Skovholt (2003) also found that there is a three stage order of changes that occur in the first years following graduation. First stage is to confirm the validity of their training. Second, when confronted with professional challenges is a sense of disillusionment with both training and self. The third stage is characterised by an intense exploration of self and the professional environment. The individual is not prepared for this felt sense of disillusionment. Many individuals look to deepen and specialise their training in this phase. Individuals experience and become more aware of the complexity of the workplace

These models show common features in professional development and a pathway to professional development. There does appear to be a path through which allied professional groups move as they progress in their profession; these paths have particular aspects at different stages. These different phases of development have different tasks and are experienced differently by individuals. There are psychological aspects to the journey that is the felt experience of the practitioners moving through the modes of development. Within social work there are, alongside this experience of professional development, some key working practices, for example supervision and reflective practice, which will be explored below.

## 2.9 Summary

Examples taken from the theoretical literature, Erickson (1950), Parkes (1971), Golan (1981), Nicholson and West (1988), Bridges (2009), show that a process of transition can be seen, mapped and conceptualised when a person makes a life change. Transition is a time of uncertainty and has different stages. Moving from being a student to being a newly qualified social worker is such a life change. Parkes (1971) and Golan (1981) from their studies suggest that there are common features in transition: feelings of anxiety, loss, and disorientation. This requires an adaption and a reorganisation of both the individuals' inner psychological world as outlined by Adams et al (1976) and Sugarman (2010).

Transition is helped by individuals beginning from a safe base, Winnicott (1973), and having transitional objects or anchors to accompany them, Pedler et al (2006).

In this research the safe base is likely to be different for each participant as is the transitional anchor or phenomenon which soothes them during their journey. Having completed a transition, an individual accommodates changes in their assumptive world, thereby making meaning for themselves and ensuring that their world becomes predictable again. In my research the safe base for the participants could be their home base, their university peer group or the course staff. Transitional objects or anchor points could be their knowledge, skills and experience.

Transition studies demonstrate that there are tasks and adjustments that need to be completed for an individual to adapt and change to a new role and job. The losses and gains that are experienced are all part of this process. Parkes (1979, 1991), Worden (2003), Colyer (2008), and Bridges (2009) all concur on this point.

Alongside these losses and gains are all the attendant issues of gaining a new role set which is unfamiliar and may be indistinctly delineated by the employing organisation. This role ambiguity can cause stress, which may form part of the individuals encounter with their new role as a qualified practitioner. New roles bring with them issues of principle and ethics which have to be engaged with as part of this personal and professional journey of transition. Benner (1984), based in nursing, Friedman and Kaslow (1986), Ronnestad and Skovholt (2003) in counselling, look at levels of development which each individual transitions through, with each level having expectations of different levels of performance.

Transition in this research is closely linked to the role that the newly qualified practitioner is to play in the organisation where their job is based. The role represents the outer world change that the student to newly qualified practitioner needs to make. The outer world of the newly qualified practitioner is explored in part 2 of this literature review.

## **Part 2: The context of social work practice**

### **2.10 Introduction**

Social work has been the subject of immense scrutiny through the Munro Review of Child Protection (2011) and Social Work Reform Board (SWRB) (2010) both government initiatives. Both have produced progress reports published in 2012. SWRB has a plan of rollout activity that continues until 2014. The Munro Review of Child Protection (2011) and the Social Work Reform Board (2010) both describe expectations of newly qualified individuals. These reports follow several major public inquiries over the last two decades, where shortfalls in social work practice have been seen as a contributing factor to the death of an adult or child for example, Ritchie, Dick and Lingham (1994), Steven Hoskins (2007), Laming Report (2003), Laming Report (2009), and Winterbourne View Hospital (2012).

Alongside these enquiries and government initiatives there are research studies looking at the experience of being newly qualified in social work and allied professions. For example, Moriarty et al (2011) undertook a literature review funded by the Department of Health looking at the experience of newly qualified professionals in social work and allied professions, nursing and teaching. This review emphasised that the difficulties and anxieties experienced by newly qualified social workers are shared by allied newly qualified professionals. The evidence presented shows that readiness to practice is gradually accumulated, not instantly acquired on qualification. Moriarty et al (*ibid*) found “comparatively little empirical research has been undertaken into newly qualified professionals’ transition into the work place. Most studies focus on perceptions of preparedness to practice rather than actual performance” (p.1342). This finding is borne out by other research studies by Marsh and Triseliotis (1996), Biggerstaff et al, (1998 cited in Moriarty, 2011) and Pithouse and Scourfield (2002). These all look at competence in the broad frame of practice readiness.

I have found that the majority of the studies, relevant to this research, are concerned with the issues of moving into practice for the first time as a qualified practitioner in child care services. Kearns and McArdle (2011) undertook a

narrative enquiry which explored resilience and emerging identity. They based their work in one locality and interviewed three social workers, two women and one man, in their first year of practice in a statutory child care setting. Kearns and McArdle (2011) found that all three liked their professional role and found it challenging and complex. The main skills that they described using were those of communication, relationship building and problem solving. They found that in the experience of these three workers induction had been significant in assisting their transition from college to work. Reflexivity as a sustained process of considering professional practice in both supervision and through learning networks was a key component of the transition experience. This is a small study based on three two-hour interviews. However it points to some key issues for newly qualified workers that can enhance their transition. That is, a consistent space to reflect on practice with peers and in supervision appears to strengthen resilience through enabling discussion of practice experience alongside recognition of the psychological and emotional issues raised by the work.

Jack and Donnellan (2010) undertook a research study in the south west of England which included thirteen social workers, nine women and four men. These participants completed a questionnaire and were interviewed twice. Ten line managers from the same local authorities completed questionnaires as did two training and development managers. This data was manually coded and categories created. All the social workers started out with “optimism and confidence, it was alarming (for the researchers) to see how quickly these feelings drained away in the face of the day to day realities of work they were required to do” (Jack and Donnellan (2010) p.316.) The participants by the time of the second interview felt unrecognised by their employers for the difficult job they were doing. Jack and Donnellan (2010) found that there was a lack of attention given to the personal and professional needs of the newly qualified social workers and their line managers. Jack and Donnellan (2010) are clear that this is a small sample in one geographical area but the themes that emerged from their data were consistent “across the sample but also echo many findings from other studies involving NQSW’s as well as allied professions.” (p.308)

Healy et al (2009) studied issues with regard to the retention of novice child protection practitioners in three countries, England, Australia and Sweden; an international comparative study, using purposive sampling over a one year timeframe. Fifty-eight interviews were held. Data was analysed thematically using NVivo, a software package. One conclusion of this work was that organisations need to value professional practice and create career pathways for front-line professionals. Healy et al found high concentrations of newly qualified staff undertaking complex assessments and that “new workers were often unprepared for the emotional intensity of the work” (p.306). Workers reported feeling that they were “not supported or protected in the emotionally challenging aspects of their work” (Healy et al (2009) (p.306)). Tensions between generalist training of social workers and the complexity of the reality of child protection work were also recorded. Participants spoke of the organisational culture being one of blame with the media playing a part in the fault-finding focus that is experienced. Poor rewards were also considered and two types were highlighted: low financial remuneration and lack of respect for the social work profession.

Bradley (2008) undertook a piece of research in one local authority in the north of England with a purposive sample of ten newly qualified social workers in family and child care services. All participants had completed their induction before joining the study. The focus of the study was to understand the extent to which the role of social workers in statutory services might be made more sustainable at the beginning of their practice. Each participant was interviewed once. There was a patchy response to induction reported, including individuals who had been students in the local authority feeling that assumptions had been made about their knowledge that did not recognise the change that there was in their work since qualification. Half the respondents felt their training had been limited and one person had no experience of child care before gaining their post. The experience of induction seemed to be dependent on the nature of the person providing the induction. Supervision was reported to be infrequent and limited. Bradley (2009) acknowledge the small nature of this sample but induction and the way that it is carried out does have a crucial part to play in transition to practice and she suggests that issues of post qualification practice could be better addressed before graduation so individual workers are more prepared for the work place.

Lyons and Manion (2004) studied annual surveys of newly qualified social workers, between 1993 and 2001. The 2001 survey sample was 1000 newly qualified social workers 12 months after graduation. Postal questionnaires were sent to this sample group and 56% were returned. One of the aspects asked of the sample was concerned the “fit between education and training and employment” (p.134). Two-thirds of respondents said that they were satisfied or very satisfied with their social work education; three quarters said the core competences that they had learned were “very relevant” (p.142) to their current employment.

Bates et al (2010), looks at newly qualified social workers in statutory settings considering both the experience of those working in adult and child care services. This study was based on a small self-selecting sample in the statutory sector in one region. The aim of the study was to look at the effectiveness of the new social work degree. The research was a longitudinal study following newly qualified social workers during their first nine months of practice. Three questionnaires were administered and a telephone interview. Twenty-two individuals formed the sample, ten working in adult services and twelve in child care services. Line managers were also asked to complete questionnaires and a small group was held for two carers and two service users. Overall three quarters of the social workers agreed that the new degree gave them the knowledge, understanding and skills that they needed for their current job. They stressed the importance of practice placements, particularly in the statutory sector. The use of induction by the employers appeared different whether the NQSW had been sponsored or not or done a placement in the area: Sponsored individuals and those who had been on placement in the area received no induction.

As already stated, many of the studies into NQSW's focus on the practice readiness and predominantly those studies have been carried out in the child care sector. However it can be seen that there are also studies which consider both practice readiness and the emotional and psychological impact of transition on NQSW's. Social work as a profession appears to be in a constant period of change in relation to policy, best practice and responding to the outcomes of

tragedy. During the time that the social work practitioners in this sample were in training, social work has been under media scrutiny as well as the research spotlight. This has led to changes in practice and the processes of undertaking social work. The profession is in transition at the same time that the research participants are in transition.

## 2.11 A Brief history of social work in recent times

In order to offer some context to current social work practice I will look at some of the major changes in the profession over the last 40 years. I will begin in the 1970s when there was a fundamental change in the way that social work was delivered in Britain. This was the beginning of service delivery which has shaped the departments of social care within local government that exist today.

The Seebohm report (1972) brought together the differing strands of social welfare functions, child care, mental health and welfare together in newly formed social services departments. This established the generic social worker, a person trained to work across the spectrum of social work issues. Parsloe and Stevenson (1978 cited by Munro, 2010) refer to the nature and expertise in the different strands that came together. This had huge implications for the training of social workers. Up until this point different assumptions had been made about the level of training necessary for undertaking different social work functions. For example mental health workers in psychiatric hospitals were required to have university based training whilst those working in the community had no formal training. Seebohm did nothing to address this issue. The training of social workers was split not by client group but by training base. First there was a university based Certificate of Qualification in Social Work (CQSW) and a decade later a Certificate of Social Service (CSS), a work based qualification. These qualifications pertained to England and Wales not Scotland.

This situation continued until the 1990s when the Diploma in Social Work was launched. This was competency based training. By 2003/04 a new 3 year degree in social work was introduced. This is still based on a generic training.



The importance of this brief historical overview of social work training to this research is that individuals still receive a generic training with specialist placements. However, when they move in to their first professional social work post they are instantly seen as either being in a team that specialises in work with children and families or a team which focuses on work with adults. These are specialist roles. Indicative of this are the vacancies pages in both the trade and national press. Jobs available are slanted towards an adult services or a child care focus.

## 2.12 Regulation of the profession

Alongside the new degree was an array of new regulatory bodies. The Care Standards Act 2000 placed the responsibility for training and regulation of social workers with the General Social Care Council (GSCC) for England. In Scotland there is the Scottish Social Services Council, in Wales the Council for Care, and there is also the Northern Ireland Social Care Council. In 2002 the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) was developed to set the educational standard for attaining a degree in higher education. There was also a Commission for Social Care Inspection created to be responsible for the inspection of social work and it's management. National Occupational Standards (NOS) for social work also came into being in 2002. The Care Standards Act 2000 provided a registration requirement for social care workers; social workers are part of this group and therefore need to be registered. This registration is held on a national database and constitutes a licence to practice. Therefore the GSCC held a register of social work practitioners. The GSCC for England generated codes of practice for social care workers, which were developed in concert with the employers.

The National Occupational Standards (NOS) for social work (2002) consist of six key roles occupied by social workers. The roles outlined are making a needs assessment, intervention and evaluation, risk management, promoting forms of self-advocacy, operating the framework of interagency accountability, and being a reflective practitioner. These are prescriptive roles aimed at giving clarity to the social work task. However, they also gave a sense that risk could be managed sufficiently and that interagency co-operation would lead to clear paths of

accountability if tragedy should strike. A theme appears to be that if there are enough rules and procedures to manage risk then it can be eliminated.

Humphrey (2006) argues the occupational standards represent “an elaboration of the competency-based framework” (p.366). She goes further in arguing that the rationale for a competency framework is that it contains the promise of “no more mistakes”. It would follow according to Humphreys (ibid) that if all students must prove that they are competent in the entire range of tasks demanded of social workers in all settings and especially all statutory ones, there will be no more scandals (p.366).

All social workers registered with the GSCC and needed to re-register every 3 years. Part of registration is signing up to a Code of Practice, which sets out that social workers should protect the rights and promote the interests of service users and carers; establish and maintain the trust and confidence of service users and carers; promote the independence of service users whilst protecting them as far as possible from danger and harm; respect the rights of service users whilst seeking to ensure that their behaviour does not harm themselves or other people; uphold public trust and confidence in social care services; be accountable for the quality of their work and take responsibility for maintaining and improving their knowledge and skills.

Humphrey (2006) notes “our new official code of ethics has done little to promote the ideals of reflective practice and anti-oppressive practice which have an honourable place in the history of the profession” (p.372).

This plethora of regulations, competency based ways of judging social work, has also generated a management structure and bureaucracy that is focused on providing an audit trail, proving that following all this guidance and protocol would ensure that practice was of a high standard and that there would be no risk to individual clients. Regulations and competence based guidance do not take account of the complexity and mystery of human relationships, which is the stuff of social work practice. Thinking, reflection and case supervision all have a part to play in safe practice.

Two major reviews have been undertaken: the Social Work Reform Board (2010) and the Munro Review (2011). Both came to similar conclusions and suggested radical changes in aspects of training and support to staff as well and in the way that the services are configured and managed.

The Social Work Reform Board (SWRB) began work in 2009 and is a development from the social work task force. The reform board has a wide ranging membership from the profession, educators, service users, carers and employers. In 2010 a progress report was published by the Social Work Reform Board (2010), *Building a safe and confident future: One year on*. This report strongly articulates that the proposed changes to the profession of social work are “interrelated and at their heart is a set of overarching professional standards which will shape what social workers should know and do as students, newly qualified social workers and at different stages in their careers.” (p.5). The first areas to be reported on were an overarching professional standards framework; a set of standards for employers and a supervision framework; a set of principles that should underpin a professional development framework; proposed requirements for social work education, and finally in this first round of reports a set of proposals for effective partnership working.

The implication of the areas is to highlight professional practice as central to the practice of social work: Emphasis on practice and not timescales and a target driven working practice. This will have significant implications for practice of social work in social services departments. The SWRB report is concerned with how social workers demonstrate that they are working to a framework based on professional principles and values. This framework has been agreed with central government, the employers and by social workers themselves. The SWRB (2010) is conscious of and articulates the needs that social workers have to work across the wide spectrum of society with adults and children and families to make positive differences to people’s lives and acknowledges to do this the profession needs “to embrace and adapt to change” (p.8 SWRB, 2010) and to do this there will need to be a clear system of training and continuous professional development. Alongside these principles for practice are proposals for an

assessed and supported first year in employment. The timescale for the reforms are 2011-2014.

The SWRB (2010) have also articulated a framework of overarching standards: the Professional Capabilities Framework for Social Workers in England. These are capabilities: Professionalism; Values and ethics; Diversity; Justice; Knowledge; Judgement; Critical reflection and analysis; Contexts and organisations; Professional leadership.

Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) marks a huge shift from a competency based framework as previously described by the National Occupational Standards. These capabilities are set out as a continuing professional development framework that offers a career pathway which takes individual practitioners from the end of their qualifying programme through their assessed and supported first year in practice through all the stages of professional development to the stage of being a principal social worker. It highlights that not all practitioners want to become managers and the PCF allows capabilities to be judged at all stages of professional practice. This framework also embraces the notion of critical reflection, highlighting the importance of this within the profession. The custodian of the PCF is the College of Social Work which came into being in summer 2012 with the demise of the General Social Care Council. The role of the College of Social Work is to set best practice. The other function of the General Social Care Council was to hold the register of social workers this function has been devolved to the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC).

The College of Social Work and Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) will need to work in tandem. It is as yet unclear how this will happen but social workers will need to keep themselves up to date with the standards that are expected by both institutions. I think of the HCPC as a quality assurance register for the public at large and the College of Social Work being focused on the professional development of the individual practitioner.

The Social Work Reform Board recommendations include an assessed and supported first year in employment (ASYE), a generic, nationally accepted post-

qualification requirement. There was general agreement from government, employers and higher education establishments for this to be in place from September 2012. Prior to this date individuals were called newly qualified social workers and employers had different programmes for initiating individuals in their first year post-qualification. The assessment of individual practitioners will be carried out within the workplace; however it is likely that there will be courses offered by higher education establishments to complement the provision within local authorities. The expectation of the SWRB is that employers and higher education centres will work in partnership in providing and developing provision for ASYE's. This is a shift in attitude and an acknowledgement that the world of social work practice is different from the protected world of a social work student and newly qualified social workers need support and assistance in their first year of practice to accommodate this change.

The Munro Review (2011) was concerned with one specific aspect of social work that is, work with children, particularly safeguarding of children at risk. The review articulates redressing the balance in child care work between "rules, principles and professional expertise" (Munro, *ibid*, p.10). The review calls for a reduction in prescription but cautions that this can only be achieved in a climate that fosters a learning system that enables social workers to gain the pre-requisite knowledge and skills. Munro (2011) stresses a return to child-focused practice "Helping children is a human process. When the bureaucratic aspects of the work are too dominant the heart of the work is lost." (p.10)

Munro (2011) highlights that the profession is unclear about what social expertise is; therefore reforms have had an inadequate impact as there is no clear model on which to base changes. This has led to models of practice being developed that are inappropriate to the task. Social workers believe that relationships play a central part in working with people. However, according to Munro (*ibid*) this has been stifled and replaced by a managerialist approach. This "managerialist approach has been called a rational-technical approach, where emphasis has been on conscious, cognitive elements of the task of working with children and families, on collecting information and making plans" (Munro, 2010, p.36). This has led to an absence from social work and social work literature of attention to

the core dynamics of undertaking work with children and families. A shift in the systemic context within social work, the emphasis is on paperwork and the management and eradication of risk. The management of risk has been translated into procedures that will stop risk and eliminate danger. This type of management practice believes that following procedures eliminates error but it does not take account of the complexity and un-predictability of human interactions. Howe (1994) argued that in a modernist context “professional discretion disappears under a mountain of departmentally generated policy and formulae” (p.529). He continues that this type of department is unable to tolerate professional discretion, creative practice and the tolerance of complexity and uncertainty.

In February 2014, two independent reviews of social work, commissioned by the government reported. Sir Martin Narey was asked to look at the “initial education of children’s social workers” (2014, p.3) and consider the impact of recent changes. Professor David Croisdale-Appleby to consider, following SWRB (2011), whether “social work education was ideally structured to best serve the profession.” (2014, p.3) Both conducted their reviews by private interviews with stakeholders and a paper analysis of evidence. Narey (2014) made 18 recommendations concerning education and training, finance of training, regulation and the College of Social Work. Croisdale-Appleby made 22 recommendations in the same areas. There some agreements and fundamental differences in the sets of recommendations. Both advocate a post-graduate profession and greater rigour in the quality assurance of training and placements for social workers. Narey (2014) recommends the College of Social Work as the regulator of social work, Croisdale-Appleby leaves that function with the HCPC. Narey (2014) recommends the development of specialist training for child service social workers. Croisdale-Appleby (2014) recommends a generic base training with specialism later, as well as a social work licence to practice.

Social work does seem to be at a crossroads again, in that the major reports seem to accord in seeking to return the profession to be more thinking and reflective about casework, and this seems to be against a tide of performance management that is concerned with targets and strict adherence to budgets and

where possible budget reductions. This is a time where the profession needs to have clarity about the professional values and principles that it holds.

### 2.13 Professionalism

Social work has grown from a variety of roots. Over time the profession of social work has allowed its clarity and focus of task to be eroded and now there is very little that is seen as clear and defined as a social work task. Bradley (2008) argues that reforms in social work have made it likely that there will emerge “a more flexible workforce in which boundaries between professionals in health, education and social care are blurred” (p.350). Abbott and Wallace (1990, cited in Bradley, 2008) argue “it is assumed that professionals have defined roles and a view of the knowledge to be transferred to new workers” (p.350). Currently in social work it is difficult for social workers to claim such definitions of occupational status as employers, other professionals and service users also play a part in defining social work roles. Lymberly (2001) has consistently plotted the curtailing of professional discretion at a practitioner level. The Social Work Reform Board (2010) has professionalism as one of their overarching standards for social work. Professionalism as described in these standards is to identify and behave as a professional social worker committed to professional development. This is difficult if the profession itself is unclear what the parameters and boundaries of its professional identity are.

I believe that the literature, particularly Lymberly's (1991, 2001) work looking at the profession over decades, demonstrates that the path of the profession and the salient defining characteristics of the profession are blurred, in the way that Bradley (2008) states there are currently no clear defining criteria of the profession of social work. There are attempts to re-define some professional boundaries, but as yet these are not fully in place. This leads to the transition process of newly qualified practitioners being unclear and unfocused.

### **Part three: Supervision and reflective practice and social workers well-being.**

Supervision and reflective practice feature highly in the latest reviews of practice: the Social Work Reform Board (SWRB) (2010) recommendations and the subsequent progress report *Building a Safe and Confident Future* (2012), and the Munro Review of Child Protection (2011) and a progress report *Moving to a child Centred System* (2012). SWRB also is concerned with the well-being of social workers and specifically NQSW; one of the recommendations made is concerned with the first year of a social worker's career. I will explore supervision, reflective practice and social worker's well-being with regard to history and current practice.

#### **2.14 Supervision**

Social work has had a long tradition of supervision as part of professional practice. In original social work teams the supervisors were the experienced staff who imparted their knowledge to newcomers. This was based on a medical model of apprenticeship, particularly from the psychodynamic casework tradition in psychiatry and psychotherapy.

Supervision has grown and developed within social work to be a central aspect of professional activity. Supervision is a concept that has been maintained in social work over the decades throughout policy changes and initiatives, be they at a national or local level. There are different forms of supervision and different emphasis placed on the nature of supervision; however, it has been a consistent part of social work practice in all sectors. Wilson et al (2008) describe the difference between case management supervision and case work supervision. The first emphasises the management of workload whilst the second is focused on direct work with service users.

Kadushin (1976) identified three components of good supervision practice. These are an administrative or managerial function that ensures good working practices are maintained. Secondly, an educative function that enables workers to develop



skills and abilities to undertake the work; and thirdly, a supportive function which enables workers to reflect on their reactions to their work.

Pettes (1979) defines supervision as a more senior and experienced social worker helping, advising and mentoring another social worker: The second social worker is accountable to the first to practice to the best of their ability. "The supervisor is responsible not only for holding the worker accountable for doing his work but enabling and if necessary teaching him so that he may do his work well" (p.3). Pettes (*ibid*) states the supervisor, the person undertaking supervision, is a link between the organisation and the operational worker. They have a responsibility to the standards of the profession, ensuring that workers keep within ethical boundaries and that service users receive services effectively and efficiently. Therefore, attention is paid to case management as well as the professional and development needs of the social worker. Ruch (2002) agrees with Kadushin (1976), and Pettes (1979) about the tasks of supervision and the role of the supervisor but adds that the supervisor has a key role in acting as a link to the wider organisation, fighting for clarity of task and resources. This is an indication of the change that there has been, and that in a resource driven department supervisors also have the task of enabling social workers to do their job by ensuring the management structure is aware of what is being demanded of workers and what they can achieve.

The context in which social workers are employed overtime has become conspicuously concerned about risk management and accountability, as previously cited in 2.13 above. Wilson et al (2008) outline the move of supervision from casework supervision to a model that places less emphasis on the support and development of the social worker and more emphasis on managerial objectives, a target driven approach to social work. Noble and Irwin (2009) argue that a push for "harm reduction and managing social risk has further increased the management role in determining the nature of social work provided" (p.349). It moves more towards evaluation of the performance of practitioners in line with organisational priorities rather than the support of professional practice and development. This shift has not taken account of the complexities of social problems and those matters which social workers deal with but there is a

lessening of support for individual workers who are still working with highly complex social problems with all the associated ethical dilemmas. Noble and Irwin (2009) continue that “the changing context of supervision has meant that supervision has changed from being a priority of the profession to a priority of management” (p.352). Supervision and well-being is explored in 2.15 below.

## 2.15 Well-being

Well-being of workers is espoused by organisations and this is part of what supervision is meant to be concerned with. That is, supervision is to ensure that the work of the social worker is carried out with integrity and in line with social work principles and values but also to have an eye to the development and well-being of the practitioner. Here I am using the definition of well-being, taken from Moore et al (2011), to be the worker’s capacity to cope with the demands made on them by the job and that this includes emotional and psychological capacity. Moore et al (2011) go further to say that self-care enhances well-being and involves purposeful and meaningful efforts that are undertaken to ensure that all dimensions of the self receive attention that is needed to make the person fit to assist others. This concept contains within it individual responsibility to pay attention to their well-being. However Payne (1979) stated that attention to self is a shared responsibility between the worker and the organisation. I argue individuals need to pay attention and be aware of their own needs within the workplace and strive for individual well-being and collective well-being. However, once an individual has become overwhelmed by their situation employers, in the first instance in the shape of supervisors and line managers need to step in.

Much has been written about social work stress and burnout, Lloyd et al (2002), Coffey et al (2004), and Collins et al (2010), but few pieces of research are concerned with how social workers maintain well-being or strive to. Workers need to maintain their personal well-being programmes and organisations need to ensure that conditions are such that well-being can be maintained. For example, the organisation needs to consider workload and expectations placed on individuals to ensure that there is sufficient time in a worker’s day and week to complete that which is expected of him/her. Completion of work should not be

based on a presumption of overtime being worked. Graham and Shier (2010) demonstrate through their research that social workers in their Canadian study felt that maintaining routine practices, for example a yoga practice or eating a breakfast every morning, were important for day to day well-being. Equally important was to have time to connect with friends and family. Graham and Shier (*ibid*) argue that having an identity beyond their work and profession is important to an individual worker's feeling of well-being.

Collins (2008) outlines that support systems in social work can be divided into two categories, formal and informal. Formal support involves line management, supervision and appraisal systems. Informal support is support from inside and outside the social work setting, involving for example colleagues, family and friends. In my research I will be looking at the experience of those making a transition from university to the workplace as a qualified worker. The experience of the participants is likely to include both formal and informal support structures. Participants will have an experience of formal support structures within the workplace, for example supervision; informal support structures within the workplace, for example with colleagues sharing collective wisdom; and outside the workplace with family and friends

Munro (2011) considers the importance of the first year in social work and advocates an assessed first year which will also function as an induction to the profession following training. Another aspect of well-being looked into by Munro is that of emotional impact and overload faced by social workers, particularly those in child protection work.

Although well-being is a subjective state unique to each individual, I believe that it is an important part of being an efficient and competent worker. Attention to personal well-being as described by Graham and Shier (2010) and emotional well-being in the workplace as described by Munro (2011) appear to be key components of looking at a transition from being a student social worker to becoming a professional practitioner. An all parliamentary inquiry into social work (2013) advocates regular workplace audits to determine the well-being of the social work workforce. This followed evidence given to the inquiry of high rates of

stress and sick leave within a system that was said to be working at full capacity. I state social workers who have maintained a good sense of well-being are likely to be more efficient and productive, meaning that employers will have less absence to contend with and staff will be retained for a longer period of time.

## 2.16 Reflective practice

Reflective practice is a key recommendation of the Munro Review (2011) and the Social Work Reform Board Report (2010). It is seen by both reports as a critical feature of social work professional practice. Taylor (2010) and Schon (1987) describe reflective practice as a way of thinking about your work. It requires a way of thinking that is all-embracing incorporating both the subjective and the objective. It can include the practitioner's previous experience, current feelings and theory. All this comes together to help the worker take stock and generate solutions to issues and problems.

Schon (1983, 1987) recognises that whenever a professional person in any profession is working and interacting with other people there is never a straightforward solution. This is because of the uniqueness of each individual's perspective, experience and circumstance. Schon (*ibid*) argues that technical rational responses are not sufficient to resolve issues in interpersonal contexts. He further describes two types of reflection: reflection-on-action, reflection after the event has happened; and reflection-in-action, reflection at the time of the event while it is happening.

Reflection-on-action could be said to be the reflective process that takes place in supervision as the practitioner looks at the event and recalls it for their supervisor. Another way this can be used is by the practitioner in the process of recording a visit to a services user. Reflection-in-action is the voice within the practitioner that they hear while working with an individual or family. This voice pulls together knowledge and experience and helps guide social work interventions. However, this is an inner voice grows with experience; a newly qualified practitioner will be at the early stages of understanding and using this facility. Casement (1990) would refer to this inner voice as the development of the internal supervisor. That

is the part of the practitioner which is able to reflect upon their work in the moment, calling upon their learning, skills and knowledge to guide them.

Three theorists who have conceptualised models of a reflective practice cycle are Kolb (1974), Gibbs (1988) and Taylor (2010). These models give practical stages within a cyclical process.

Kolb's model (1974) is grounded in experiential learning theory. The individual is engaged in a reflective cycle that conceptualises different stages in a reflective process. First, a concrete experience: something happens from which they then step back and reflect, reflective observation. New ways of thinking about the subject of the reflective process are constructed in the abstract conceptualisation phase. Jones and Joss (1995) describe this as constructing new theories of action. The active experimentation phase is to put the theories and ideas into action (p.30), that is, putting the ideas into practice and trying them out before entering the cycle of reflection again. It is an iterative process of learning. At a simple level the model can be seen as experiencing, reviewing, thinking and doing. This model is based on cognition: it does not actively engage the participant in considering the emotional content of their experience.

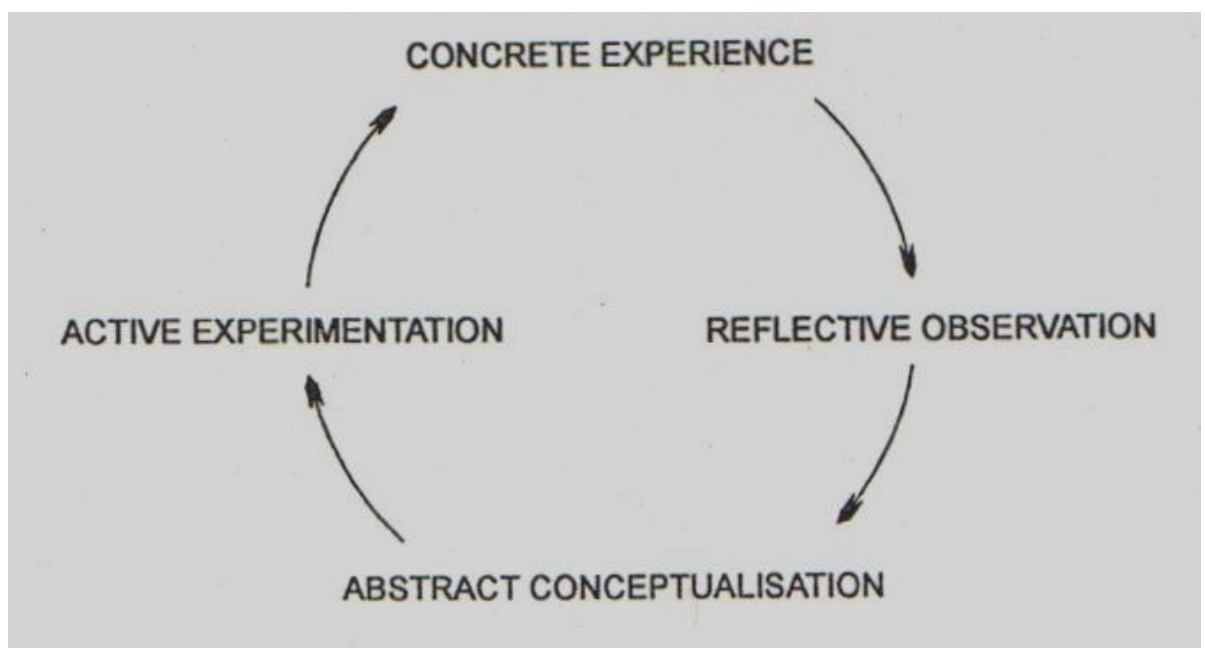


Figure 4: Kolb's 1974 model

Kolb's model was developed and modified by Gibbs (1998). Gibbs' model has six steps and takes account of the emotional impact of the experience on the practitioner or learner. Each part of the process is divided into clear tasks for reflection and crucially includes what the individual was thinking and feeling at the time of the incident. The evaluation stage is key as the practitioner or learner looks at the positives and the less good parts of the experience not just focusing on one aspect or the other. The practitioner is invited to make meaning and sense about the subject of reflection before moving to consider future action or actions.

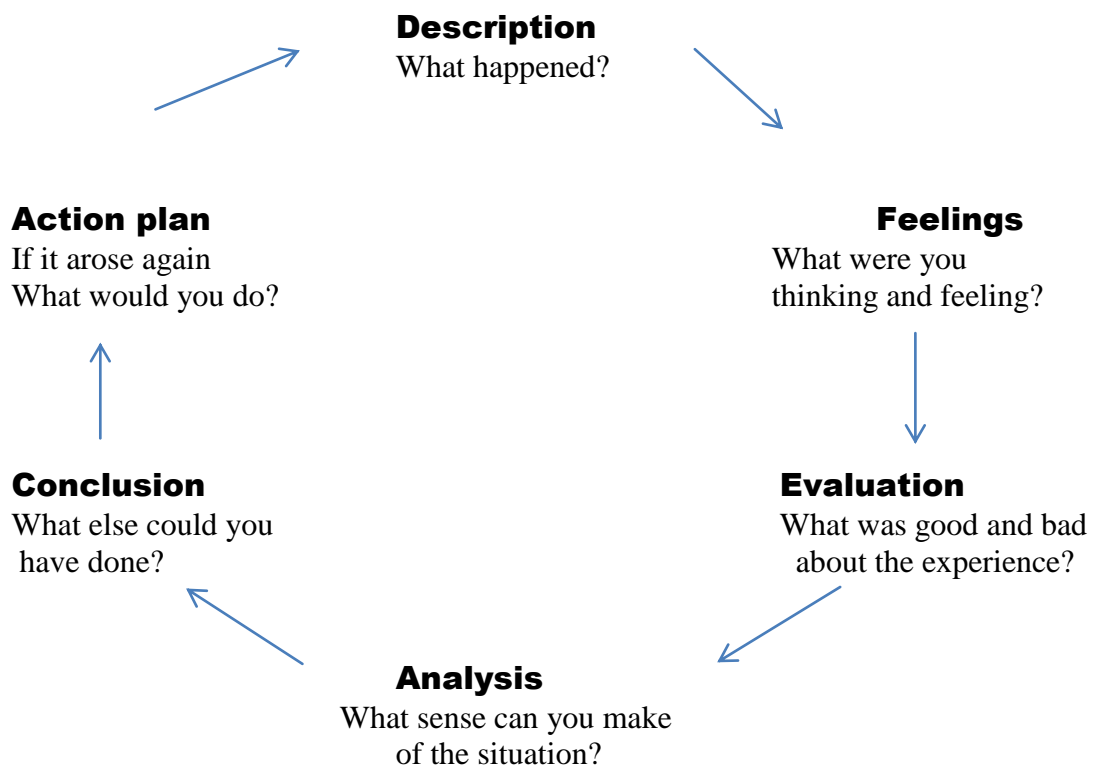


Figure 5: Gibbs' model of reflection (1988)

This is an important reflection development for use in social work as the inclusion of the emotional impact on the practitioner ties into patterns of supervision for social workers that include being supportive of their development and well-being in a situation. This moves reflective practice from a solely cognitive activity to one which recognises emotional and cognitive processes are involved in reflecting on events and incidents. In the case of social work it includes the emotional impact on the social worker of working in complex human systems: reflection at an individual and an organisational level.

Taylor (2010) has developed a further iteration of reflection modelling. I would argue that this is a more holistic model. Taylor (*ibid*) places the model in the context of practice; the sphere at the centre of the model is the practitioner's world of practice, for example nursing, teaching, psychotherapy, social work. The word REFLECT creates the bands that circle the model and stand for: Readiness; Exercising thought; Following systematic processes; Leaving one's self open to answers; Enfolding insights; Changing awareness; Tenacity in maintaining reflection (p.63). The small spheres that orbit the larger spherical shape are the external constraints that the work context has. This includes cultural, historic, economic, social, political and personal forces. Taylor (2010) argues that reflective practice is a central part of professional practice. Her model takes account of the unpredictable and ever changing context in which practitioners work.

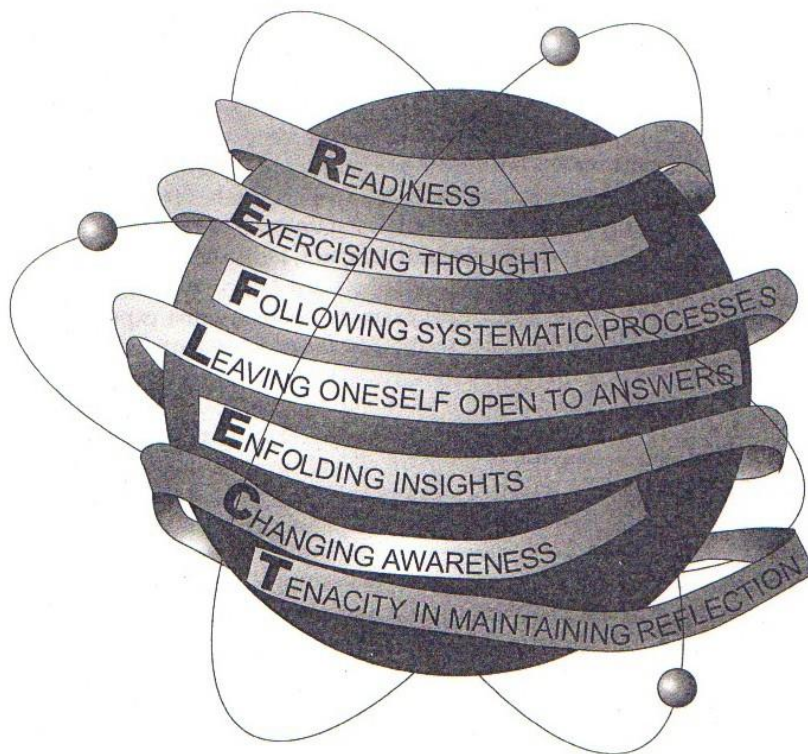


Figure 6: Taylor's model of reflection (2010)

The model represents reflective practice as an operating practice that flows through the work, not a set of separate stages or processes. I would state that this

model offers a process as well as guidance of what needs to be included in a practitioner's reflective practice. It contextualises practice and places reflection in the context of practice not an exercise that is detached from context. The model also indicates that reflection is an activity that one readies one's self for and that tenacity is needed to maintain reflection.

Ruch (2002, 2005, 2007) looks at the different types and levels of reflection that may exist together or separately. There are three forms according to Ruch: technical reflection, practical reflection and critical reflection. Technical reflection is focused on "what did I do and how can I do this better". This level of reflection is based on formal theory and research, the aim being more effective and efficient outcomes which can be measured. This type of reflection is after the event and tends to focus on reflection on action, not the process dimensions of the work. Practical reflection includes theoretical knowledge and personal experience and encourages reflection on self - the practitioner's part in the process with the other, the service user. This helps the practitioner recognise professional bias and ensures that they keep an open mind with regard to service user choice. Critical reflection includes the other two types of reflection and adds a context dimension and a challenge to the prevailing social and political structures to promote the interests of oppressed others. This model, like Taylor's (2006), encourages individuals to engage in the complexity of reflection. I would argue that this model has a developmental element within its overall structure. Individuals who are beginning their practice may start by using technical reflection and as they become more experienced, move to use the other two types of reflection to build a more comprehensive process.

Reflective practice is taught to social work practitioners as part of their training curriculum and could be a key tool as students move from university into professional practice. There is little written about how reflective practice is used or how useful social work practitioners have found it once in practice. Reflective practice appears in textbooks, for example Taylor (2010) Wilson et al (2008) Knott and Scragg (2009). However, these texts are about how to do reflective practice, not researching how reflective practice is used by newly qualified practitioners.



All three models above are similar in that they are an exercise in considering work after the event to learn from what has happened. This type of reflection calls for an opportunity to sit, reconnect, and think about the work that has been done. Work of reflecting can be a neglected area in current organisational structure, where the focus is on targets and work completion. Laming (2003, 2009) and Munro (2010) have written about this. In a managerialist and target-driven organisation it is not easy to quantify the benefits of reflective practice, which can be seen as an unproductive use of time. However, allowing space for reflection can provide opportunities to consider appropriate plans to work within a complex situations, gives the social worker and supervisor opportunities to ensure that the worker has the skills for the job they are being asked to do, and connect to the workers wellbeing.

## 2.17 Summary

Transition is a process that involves physical, emotional, psychological and social aspects of an individual's life. Each process of transition has stages. These can be conceptualised from an array of models but they share in common the idea of process and steps or stages within a process. Transition is not a linear process, being both progressive and regressive. In the case of this research it occurs from the first state of being a student social worker to a second state of becoming a qualified practitioner and taking up a first post in an organisation as a qualified social worker. This transition includes changes in role, professional and personal expectations. Psychological, social and emotional adaptations to these changes brought about by transition are necessary. The individual experience of transition needs to be considered from a psychological, social and professional standpoint

Becoming a newly qualified social work practitioner means taking on the mantle of a qualified social worker. This is not just taking a job and working to the job description; there are many aspects of becoming a qualified social worker that are not straightforward. It is entering a profession that is unsure of its professional ground and therefore is constantly under review and subject to changing expectations from society at large and employers.

Youll (1985) describes how social work practice

“Typically involves the worker in problematic and complex situations, each with unique features and unlikely to be amenable to standardised responses. The outcome of the work is rarely predicted or prescribed with any accuracy. It calls for the exercise of discretion and frequently requires judgements to be made in relation to conflicts of interests and potentially risky situations” (p.13).

Since the Seebohm Report (1972) brought together the differing strands of social welfare functions, child care, mental health and welfare, in newly formed Social Services Departments, social workers have been involved in an ever changing landscape of social welfare in response to reports, reviews and inquiries. Each of these has brought into being differing ways of working, accounting for practice and the aim of minimising risk to service users. The overarching theme of the last decade has been the minimisation of risk. However, this may have been the aim but this way of thinking does not and cannot account for all the eventualities of the complexities of the human psyche and human relationships.

Menzies (1970) argued “the success and viability of a social institution are intimately connected to the techniques it uses to contain anxiety” (p.39). Social institutions need to consider how they manage anxiety that emanates from the work that is being carried out. Working with issues and problems in people’s lives, or working within families on the margins who have complex needs, is likely to uncover difficult and anxiety creating situations. If organisations do not have ways of working with this anxiety, it is left to individual practitioners to manage. Organisations’ concern with targets and risk management using rules and procedures are unlikely to be able to contain feelings of anxiety, which do not readily fall into frameworks.

Harlow (2010) argues “Central government, by means of performance targets and guidelines, now dictates in greater detail the parameters of social work practice and managers operationalize the government’s wishes. Social workers now act in accordance with a chain of command.”(p.171). These processes do not offer the support that practitioners need to deal with highly complex and anxiety provoking social work dilemmas, which are society and community issues.

Supervision is a key part of social work activity and has been so for many years. However, over time in England there has been a shift from casework to managerial supervision. Casework supervision focuses on the work of the social work practitioners whereas management supervision is more concerned with outputs and meeting targets and deadlines. Bradley et al (2010) in a comparative study of supervision in England, South Africa and Sweden found that in Sweden there is a model of supervision based more on continuous professional development where supervision is external to the social workers employing organisation. External supervision in Sweden, according to Bradley et al (2010), “draws heavily on the educative and support functions of supervision and on practice knowledge which is based on ‘professional logic’”(p.784).

Qualified social workers are regularly supervised that is their practice is considered in the light of targets and drivers from central and local government. They are also expected to reflect on their own practice ensuring that they are working both in the service user’s interests and in line with the practice principles of the profession. There does appear to be an imbalance between the targets and drivers and best practice principles. Over time there appears to be greater attention in supervision to accountability and less emphasis on the needs of the practitioner. The complex social problems still exist; qualified workers seem to deal with these more on their own, without the benefit of in depth casework support.

Reflective practice is a way of individual practitioners considering their work and reflecting on the passage and progress of the work. This is not, however, the same as supervision. In fact reflective practice is a tool that can be used to prepare for casework supervision but does not fully stand in the place of it. The importance of casework supervision is that the second person is helping in the process of reflection and guarding against the practitioner not looking at uncomfortable issues and blind spots in their practice.

It is important to consider how the newly qualified practitioners look after themselves in this time of transition. What needs to be in place for them at this time? There will not be a blueprint of well-being that can be applied to all,

however; each person will have activities and patterns unique to them. Well-being is an important issue for the individual and the organisation as a competent and efficient social worker who feels that their well-being is being maintained is less likely to suffer burnout or be absent from the work place.

My research is looking at the experience of a newly qualified practitioner as they enter the workplace. This research aims to take a holistic view of experience and will include the formal and informal structures that affect the experience of individual practitioners. Social work reports and research often concentrates on the competence of newly qualified practitioners but not their experience of their changing role and the issues that they encounter while in transition. Transition studies heavily concentrate on the chronological transitions, including those of young adults moving from college to the workplace. The participants in my study are not all first time college leavers and are all mature students leaving university to return to the workplace as newly qualified practitioner - a new role with a set of prescription and expectations attached. The context of social work is currently in flux and there are many concerns in both the literature and reports into practice that point to a state of confusion within the profession and the way that individuals are supervised and enabled to reflect on their practice.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology and Fieldwork**

This chapter has two parts. Part 1 concerns methodology, part 2 has as its focus fieldwork undertaken

### **Part 1. Methodology**

This is qualitative piece of research using a phenomenological framework. My study is focused on the experience of individuals as they make the journey from university education and training into the profession of social work as a newly qualified social work practitioner in their first year in the profession. The key focus of the research is individual experience, with a particular reference to supervision and reflective practice. A method needs to be employed that will capture the experience of those in the transition from completing social work student to qualified practitioner over time, in this instance their first year in practice.

The experience of each individual participant could not be prescribed at the outset of the enquiry as it is their unique experience that I wished to study. The research is an emergent unfolding process. Experience cannot be observed or second guessed, it needs to be explored and recorded, allowing the participants to inform the researcher of how they are making sense of what is happening to them and the meaning that they attribute to this.

#### **3.1 Research traditions**

Research is a broad canvas of methodologies and methods. Giorgi and Giorgi (2008) take a broad view of science and assert that "science" is concerned with "systematic rigorous endeavour that needs to be properly carried out if it is to produce knowledge that is trustworthy and reliable." (p.170). This includes both

positivist deductive and inductive approaches to knowledge creation. The difference between deduction and induction is in the way research is carried out: induction being a theory building process beginning from looking at specific instances of a phenomena and seeking to generalise; deduction being the testing of a theory, seeking to apply a theory to specific instances.

Theoretical debates are concerned with the way in which theory is developed and the relationship between theory and research. Stanley and Wise (1983, p.48) argue that a deductive approach is where theory precedes research. An abstract hypothesis is constructed and tested. Inductive theory is theory construction which is derived from experience. It is scientific mind's experience of the world which appears as theory (Stanley and Wise, 1983, p.48.).

An inductive research study arises from a close, in depth relationship with the research data in order to draw conclusions. It is a process of uncovering through immersion and familiarity with the data. A deductive approach is the imposition of theories and categorisation to the data from the beginning of the research process; beginning with a theory to be tested. When considering any research study, deductive or inductive, the good work in both cases will be objective and open to criticism. The reasons and evidence brought by both cases needs to be able to withstand scrutiny, justifying conclusions drawn.

I argue that both inductive and deductive research methods are valid perspectives: the aim is to select the most appropriate method for the study in hand. The key is what type of study is being proposed and for what purpose the research is to be undertaken. My research will be inductive. I will be exploring the experience of transition from university to the workplace by interviewing participants over time, their first year of practice, as a qualified practitioner. I will not be imposing theory or categorisation from the beginning, I have not constructed an abstract hypothesis to test. I will work closely with the data to draw out commonality and disparity within the data set.

### 3.2 Quantitative and qualitative

Miles and Huberman (1984) asserted “it is getting harder to find any methodology solidly encamped in one epistemology or another” (p.20) and go further to suggest that researchers should be working in a blended way open to using a range of techniques rather than one. Avis (2005) states that the “quantitative and qualitative arise from a prescriptive view of epistemology...assumptions about the nature of knowledge” (p.4). This implies that there is only one way of constructing knowledge which is through systematic testing of hypotheses through experimentation: a positivist deductive approach. Avis (2005, p.4) states “quantitative research is assumed to be based on objective measurement, hypothesis testing, law-like generalisation, reproducible design and pursuit of factual knowledge. These principles are often brought together under the label positivism.” Avis continues that there is however “no agreed definition of quantitative methods” (*ibid* p.4). Avis (2005) believes that the label positivism is imprecise and not owned by most quantitative researchers. The positivist approach holds that the researched and the researcher are independent of each other. That is, the researcher is an objective outsider who looks at the subject of the research.

Robson (2002) argues that there is an acceptance by post-positivists that the theories, hypotheses, background knowledge and values of the researcher can influence what is observed. Post-positivism strives for general laws and theories to understand the social world, to find the truth about something. Robson (*ibid*) argues that post-positivism is not one school of thought but more a range of theorists who share some but not all of a range of views (*ibid* p.22). This denotes a move away from the traditional view of the researcher as objective outsider who is observing the subject of the research to one where the researcher and the researched affect each other.

Qualitative methods of inquiry have been used in sociology, psychology and social work consistently since the 1980s, although the origins of these methods first appear in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Holosko 2010). Holosko (2010), citing Filstead (1970, p103), gives the origins of qualitative research as “first-hand experience of the social world”. Filstead stated further “that the researcher is in (the event) and as such becomes an active part of the event that

he or she is investigating” (*ibid* p.103). Strauss and Corbin (1990) use the term “qualitative research as any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification” (p.17). McLeod (2001) states “the primary aim of qualitative research is to develop an understanding of how the world is constructed.” (p.2)

Qualitative research gives priority to obtaining and analysing textual data. That is, qualitative research methods are committed to collecting rich text rather than numbers and relies on extensive interaction with the people being studied. It usually involves a flexible plan of inquiry, evolving as the research takes place, the researcher being a research instrument. Strauss and Corbin (1990) state observations or interviews are the commonest ways to collect data, which is then analysed or interpreted. Avis (2007) states qualitative research has as a priority obtaining, developing and analysing textual data. Often such research has a flexible plan. The emphasis is on understanding individuals’ experience and what meaning they are making of the world

For this study I do not have a clear hypothesis to test in relation to the experience of the participants. There are no absolute factors to be tested in the experience of social work students making the transition into the workplace, so a deductive research method cannot be adopted. This study begins without a hypothesis. As I immerse myself in the data, knowledge will develop to explain the experience of participants in the sample. This is an inductive approach. I will explore and aim to understand the experience of student social workers moving from university to work as a qualified practitioner, a transition that will be unique to each participant involved in the study. I will need to build a relationship with the participants in order that they feel able to tell me of their unique transition experience during interviews and, as such, I will immerse myself in the participant’s experience of transition; from this immersion, conclusion and insights will be drawn.

To summarise: the research is based in a qualitative framework rooted in an inductive research tradition.

### 3.3 Phenomenology and hermeneutics: philosophical



## underpinnings

Phenomenology and hermeneutics are in essence ways of describing and understanding human experience. Phenomenology and hermeneutics are two different epistemologies that have informed qualitative research practice in western social science.

### i) Phenomenology

Phenomenology, according to Eatough and Smith (2008), is “concerned with the way things appear to us in experience: the reality that we live is an experiential one and it is experienced through practical engagements with things and others in the world and it is inherently meaningful” (p.179). Holosko (2010, p.349) offers a simplified definition of phenomenology that is “to describe and understand the lived experiences of individuals”. Phenomenology has an emphasis on lived experience which accords with the issues that my research is targeting.

Husserl, a late nineteenth century philosopher, set himself the task of creating a phenomenological understanding of the world (McLeod 2001 p.35). Husserl sought to find the ultimate truth about our lives in the world and the social construction of that world. He was looking for the roots and conditions that underlie human experience. McLeod, (2001, p.36) argues that “There are clearly profound issues here, concerning the nature of being human, and the role of language and culture in our human-ness”. McLeod says Husserl argued that it was necessary to examine the “bedrock” (McLeod, 2001,p. 36) of everyday experience, because it is there, in our emotions, actions and perceptions of things and relationships, from which true understanding could be derived.

Phenomenology strives to describe the essence of everyday experience. Furthermore, to do this the researcher has to rigorously examine their own experience of the world (McLeod, 2001, p.37). Phenomenology begins in the realm of philosophy and has been applied to the world of social science research. Phenomenology was not designed for social scientific research but phenomenological research has come to be concerned with getting detailed

descriptions of phenomena in human experience. In phenomenological research the researcher is mindful and sensitive to the phenomenon being investigated, immersing themselves in the data to ensure that a very detailed description of the phenomenon is given. Participants' exact phrasing is used to give a more precise sense of what the participant has experienced. Giorgi (2008 p.171) states that finally a general structure of the experience of the phenomenon is articulated. Smith et al (2009) assert that phenomenology does or should connect to everyday experience, listening and reflecting that experience. Halling (2008) describes phenomenological research as a live dynamic activity not just a collection of scholarly ideas. As with many branches of philosophical thought there is not one agreed path into the application of phenomenology to a research process.

I, as the researcher, need to have a willingness to look at my existing theories and beliefs enquiringly. It is like beginning on a journey leaving a known place and returning to that place and seeing the old with fresh eyes. I needed to reflect and review my thoughts and feelings in relation to my topic in order to have freshness in my enquiry. I used my own experience during the research to inform the research by keeping a research journal, recording matters which I had awareness of which may have affected my research.

A further development in Husserl's phenomenological thinking is the concept of bracketing. This is akin to the use of brackets in mathematical theory. Husserl's view was that if we put brackets around the phenomena being studied, this limits the effects of the researcher on the phenomenological field. The aim is to close oneself to all extraneous detail so the phenomena appear clearer to the researcher. The brackets help the phenomena become clear and available for study. As the researcher finds more aspects of the phenomena more parts are bracketed, so the essence of the studied phenomena can be gradually revealed. Bracketing is described by Smith et al (2009, p.13) as separating out the contents within the brackets in the same way brackets are used within mathematical equations. Bracketing does not mean taking away or making disappear, but rather to separate out all the aspects that might influence - the researcher and the participant. That is, the researcher brackets specific areas for study in order to enter and understand that specified area. This may be part of the participant's

experience or it may be part of the researcher's experience triggered by the research process. Smith et al (2009) articulates this as, "to bracket the content of consciousness in order to gaze in wonder at consciousness itself" (p.13).

There is much debate among those using phenomenological methods about bracketing. Bracketing according to Hendry and McLafferty (2010) can be characterised as a continuum. At one end of the continuum is the use of brackets as being a method of cutting off from the world, whilst at the other end bracketing is seen as a process of mental reasoning. This can include how pre-conceived ideas can influence and alter research analysis; bracketing being a way to assist against "compromising the rigour of research in respect of its credibility" (p.3). Bracketed material is made explicit in the research process.

My approach to bracketing echoes that of Hendry and McLafferty (2010). I will use brackets as part of my attempt at being open to my own processes throughout the research. Bracketing will form part of my reflective practice as a researcher. I know that I will have some prior knowledge or preconceived ideas that might affect the decisions I make in data analysis. I will endeavour to make clear what elements I have preconceived ideas or concepts about, and place them in brackets to increase the transparency of my decision-making processes.

At the outset of the research study I cannot be clear about all the issues that might be uncovered as the research develops, and as such I am unable to bracket all possible preconceptions. Bracketing is not a one off exercise as the effects of the research might affect me differently over time. The issues raised for me cannot all be known at the outset. I will need to be vigilant throughout the research process and through my reflective journal regularly record and review my process and decision making. My preconceptions and reflective notes will be important at the research analysis stage. I was able to revisit my pre-conceived ideas and consider the effect that these might have had on my decisions during analysis, as themes emerge from the participants' data. For example, I may begin with some preconceptions about the needs of a newly qualified social worker based on my past experience of once being a newly qualified social worker, being a practice teacher, being a manager. All of these experiences will need to be

bracketed as I approach the data to ensure my subjective views do not cloud emergent participant themes.

The idea of bracketing will not ensure that all preconceptions are dealt with but it means that as a researcher I have a fuller awareness of the pre-conceived ideas that might affect my analysis of the data. A reflective stance is therefore required of the researcher, thinking and considering the material in depth and their own reactions to that material as the research continues. Reflecting on the process both requires and allows me as a researcher to consider my experience and emotions in relation to the research and how this experience might be influencing what I am observing and recording. This includes my historical and cultural experience that might influence the research. Therefore bracketing becomes part of the reflective process within this research. I believe a conscious use of bracketing and reflective practice will contribute to methodological originality of this research. I will further explore reflexivity in researcher orientation in section 3.7.

#### ii) Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is concerned with interpretation. This concerns the understanding of the whole of a text and how the parts of a text help illuminate the whole, and the whole influences and illuminates the parts. There is a circularity here of understanding. There is also a constant interplay between the interpreter, of text or research data, and the object of interpretation, text or material from a research participant. Packer (1989 cited in Giorgi 2008) states "the goal to which interpretive enquiry is ultimately directed is not just one of mirroring reality in a descriptive account, but of changing it for the better" (p.168). Interpretation here is left undefined.

McLeod (2001) offers a definition of the difference between a hermeneutics approach to research and that of an interpretative approach, and argues that "first hermeneutics is essentially a cultural and historically informed method" (p.22). He continues: "to work properly as a system for producing reliable and practical knowledge, hermeneutics requires the existence of publically accessible data. Neither of these factors is necessary to conduct an interpretative inquiry" (p.22)

McLeod further argues that “hermeneutics is a tradition informed inquiry” (2001, p.23). Contextual inquiry is at the heart of hermeneutics research, questions are always viewed in their cultural-historical context and from the context or tradition of the researcher their culture and history are integrally bound into the research.

A hermeneutic position is that of embracing the realities of who we are as people and as researchers rather than believing that culture, history and tradition can be transcended. Pre-understandings need to be explored; this process feeds into understanding of the topic of research. I need to research the topic of social work and the newly qualified social work practitioner in order to understand some of the cultural and political implications for social work in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Heidegger (1889-1976), a German philosopher, took ideas from phenomenology and hermeneutics and blended them into an approach for understanding everyday life, the practical activities and relationship that make up people’s lives (Willig and Stainton-Rogers 2008). Heidegger wished to understand everydayness; he strove to appreciate the essence of everyday life and was interested in what it meant to be human. Heidegger was keen to understand aspects of the research process and began to question aspects of questioning. Questions are based on assumptions made by the researcher who formulates the research questions. Heidegger wanted to understand the meanings behind the language of the inquirer to reveal hidden meaning and open up new aspects of whatever is being investigated. McLeod (2001, p.62) succinctly states that “Rather than seeking to produce an abstract intellectual/ rational representation of the world, Heidegger saw authentic knowing as connected with, and intrinsic to, the task of relating to the world within which one finds oneself.”

The importance of Heidegger for me is that he was curious about the everyday experience of people. I am curious about one part of everyday experience, that of an individual’s experience of their workplace. Heidegger also believes that the researcher influences the research by their choice of questioning and the wording of questioning. I connect this to being transparent as it is possible to be about researcher bias and preconceptions at the start and throughout the research process.

It is important to my conceptual position to acknowledge both phenomenology and hermeneutics in undertaking research which is aimed at understanding individual experience. That is, both uncovering meaning that individuals accord to their experience as well as interpreting that meaning.

### 3.4 Types of qualitative research methods

Having explored the philosophical basis for research I considered different types of research methods. Holosko (2010) offers a helpful overview of the main qualitative research methods which appears as Table 1 below.

Table 1 Holosko's overview of qualitative research methods

Main Methods	Simplified Definition
1. Phenomenology	To describe and understand the lived experience of individuals
2. Narration	Detailed narrative accounts of individual, event, themes, life histories and their meanings
3. Case study	Examining individual units comprising cases of individuals, groups, families, settings, interventions, communities or cultures.
4. Ethnography	Studying cultures to learn about their interactions, values, meanings, behaviours, language and/or worldview
5. Action/participatory research	Identifies a social problem or concern and seeks information about them by collaborations with individuals and/or organizations
6. Participant Observation	Observing activities, events, people, interactions, meaning and/or worldview through the cultivation of personal relationships
7. Grounded Theory	The systematic generation of data

8. Practice and programme evaluations studies	<p>based theory to develop explanations, hypotheses, concepts, typologies, meanings and/or descriptions of phenomena</p> <p>To assess and understand practice/programme goals, objectives, and or outcomes using naturalistic inquiry methods.</p>
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Reviewing the various possibilities it quickly became apparent that evaluation studies and participant observation were not applicable to this area of study. I was not evaluating a programme or researching social patterns and interactions or seeking to understand a social problem or concern by engaging collaborators. I could not embed myself as a newly qualified social worker and I had not been recently trained. I had been a newly qualified social worker and made that transition but that was not who I was now and I could not re-enter the space of the newly qualified practitioner.

Similarly, I was not aiming to work with participants in a joint collaborative exercise to solve a social or work issue. As such, an action research or participative study would not be suitable to explore the individual experience of transition.

Narrative case studies are concerned with the detailed account that individuals give of events, life patterns, and their meaning. This is a more retrospective activity. I am interested in the present experience of the individual and am asking them to reflect on their time at university to help understand and make meaning of their present experience of the work environment. Case studies are often used in exceedingly complex case situations more akin to exploring the dynamic between therapist and client in psychotherapeutic practice. However, case studies as a way of giving an overview of participant's journey may be a useful tool as part of a research method.

Grounded theory is the generation of a data based theory to develop a theoretical framework, set of explanations, typologies or descriptors of phenomena. I am

looking at experience in an open manner by wanting the individual to give meaning to their experience, not aiming to generate theory of experience.

Ethnography is the study of life of a culture or group of people. It seeks to understand a way of life. "Ethnographers are interested in *all* aspects of human behaviour; roles, rituals, belief systems, myths, language, religion, food, history, and physical environment" (McLeod, 2001, p.64). Ethnographic research has been characterised as "the art and science of describing a group or culture" (McLeod (2001, p.64). This type of study looks at the total way of life of a particular social or cultural group. The methodology employed by ethnographers is that of observation and interviews, observation being the primary source of data, interviews being a secondary source of data. In order to use an ethnological approach I would have needed to gain access to the workplace of my participants and follow their progress throughout their first year. This was not feasible from an ethical or time stance. The ethical issues of observing social workers at work would be too intrusive and the effect that my presence would have on the working practice would be too great to justify the method. I am interested in a specific segment of transition experience that is being shared by a small discrete group of people who come from a range of social groupings. This group share in common the experience of being students, who have studied in a particular university, at a particular location and at a particular time, who are taking their first steps into qualified social work experience. Other social and cultural influence will not be known to the researcher as they are beyond the scope of this study.

One methodology, Interpretative Phenomenology, developed by Benner in the 1980's in nursing studies, is concerned with understanding the development of clinical skills: particularly enabling nurses to understand human beings in their diversity, both cultural and physical. This methodology does not have or cannot be reduced to a set of procedures and techniques. The aim is to get the best possible account of a situation and the researcher then interprets these accounts. Interpretation of the collected material according to Benner (1994) "must be auditable and plausible" (Benner, 1994, xvii) and be "guided by ethical understanding and responsiveness" (Benner, 1994, xvii). Those undertaking this type of research need to have self-knowledge, as this is said to limit the



interpreters' projections on to the text; that is, the researcher is constrained by the text and illuminates the participant's world as fully as possible. The aim is for the interpretation to come from the material gathered and not the researcher's views. The reader of the research is engaged and plays an active part in interpreting the work, bringing their experience and judging the interpretations made.

Benner (1994) outlines the analysis stage of an interpretative phenomenological study. First the texts are read several times: the data for analysis includes interviews, field notes, and diaries. All the material is read and from this macro analysis lines of inquiry are identified and tied back to the theoretical background of the study and to the themes that are consistently emerging from the texts. This analysis leads to general categories. The second aspect of the process is to look at specific incidents or events to find exemplars that capture the meaning of the specific event or incident. Benner sees an exemplar as a particular transaction which is meaningful. The last aspect of the research is the identification of paradigm cases; these provide rich descriptive information for understanding particular actions and particular clinical situations.

I found this way of working meeting many of the criteria I had set for the method I was looking to use in my study. However this methodology was clear that it was practice-focused in a particular discipline. I was not investigating a practice domain or any specific theory and would not be looking to find exemplars to explain best practice or illuminate practice issues. I wanted to allow the experience of the participants to inform the study and my interpretation would be at the stage of drawing together what had been found, the convergence and the divergence of material both being important to me.

A further method that I considered was that of thematic analysis. Thematic analysis as described by Braun and Clarke (2006) is a method of identifying themes from within the data rather than imposing pre-defined themes. Braun and Clarke (*ibid*) note that this is analysis which is "data-driven" (p.83). Braun and Clarke (*ibid*) state that "thematic analysis is not wedded to any pre-existing theoretical framework and therefore can be used within different theoretical frameworks" (p.81). They go further to state that "thematic analysis can be used

as a method that works both to reflect reality and to unpick or unravel the surface of reality.” (p.81); that is, it identifies, analyses and reports patterns within a data set. Researchers hold a reflexive stance to ensure that the data analysis stays close to the data set. Although this method of work held many characteristics important to me for research, I was clear that I wanted to explore experience of the participants but also I wanted to interpret the experience that each participant was experiencing.

I have chosen to undertake a piece of qualitative research and within that to use a phenomenological approach. However, this is not a study looking at enabling individuals to detail and express in isolation the meaning that they are making of their transition experience. I was looking for a methodological approach which allows the researcher the freedom to interpret the findings through their own lens. That is, the researcher pulls together a wide interpretation of the participant's experience. Due to my study being about experience and the social and psychological effects of transition on an individual, I looked within the health and individual psychology literature. An approach, developed in the field of psychology, which has been used extensively in health psychology, is interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). IPA is a research framework and that comes from a phenomenological and hermeneutic base (Smith et al 2009).

### 3.5 Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA).

IPA is concerned with human lived experience and posits that experience can be understood through an examination of the meaning which people impress upon it. Meaning may in turn illuminate the embodied cognitive affective and existential domains of individual psychology (Smith et al 2009). According to Smith et al (2009, p.205), there are “three core principles of interpretative phenomenological analysis:

- First, phenomenology, a philosophical approach to the study of experience - committed to thinking about how we might come to understand what our experiences of the world are like, how to examine and comprehend lived experience.

- Second, hermeneutics, the theory of interpretation.
- Third, idiography, a concern with the particular case or unique individual. ”

IPA, as a method of enquiry, originated in psychology and was developed from the work of Husserl. As discussed previously, Husserl was a philosopher whose major contribution to philosophy was his ideas and consideration of the conceptual process involved in phenomenology.

Eatough and Smith (2008) argue that “IPA is a combination of two philosophic traditions, phenomenology and hermeneutics. Without phenomenology there would be nothing to see or interpret and without the hermeneutics the phenomena would not be seen” (p. 180). IPA is usually concerned with experience of a particular time or moment of significance to the person, e.g. first time motherhood, Smith (2007), or the exploration of perceptions of renal dialysis, Smith (1996). IPA is concerned with ordinary everyday experience which becomes an experience of importance, engaging with the significance of what has happened and trying to make sense of that experience. Eatough and Smith (*ibid*) argue that IPA is concerned with the detailed examination of individual lived experience and how individuals make sense of the experience. IPA offers detailed nuanced analyses of a particular instance of lived experience. The aim is to focus on people’s experience and understanding of a particular phenomenon. IPA does not purport to set out to understand the experience of the participants, but to gain their perceptions and views of the experience that they have had. An IPA researcher therefore aims to gather information about perception of individual experience not to come up with a definitive understanding of individual experience.

This is a research method where the researcher is close to the experience of the research participant. The researcher and the participant have a relationship which explores the experience that the researcher is interested in and that the participant is experiencing. IPA is interpretative and recognises the role of the researcher in making sense of the experience of the participants (Shinebourne 2011). The researcher needs to be aware of their influence on the research

process. Part of this recognition is the researcher understanding their influence on the research process and the interpretation of data. This can be achieved by reflecting on, recording and bracketing their preconceptions as an integral part of the research process. That is, pre-conceived views and thoughts of the researcher are reflected upon and thought is given as to how this might affect the process of the research and the interpreted analysis. Findlay (2008) states that the researcher has to “critically and reflexively evaluate how this pre-understanding influences the research.”(p.17). Smith (2009) contends that it may not be possible to know in advance which preconceptions or part of one’s preconceptions maybe relevant in the specific situation, and preconceptions themselves change in the process of interpretation.

### 3.6 Application

Writers such as Larkin, Watts and Clifton (2004) and Smith (2004) see IPA as an integrative approach that uses analytic interpretation of participants’ accounts, drawn from the accounts of participants but which may go beyond the participants’ sense making and conceptualisations.

The researcher explores the context and the pattern of relationships and meaning that the person has. The researcher acts as detective and facilitates the articulation and making sense of the experience once it has occurred. This type of research means that the researcher is deeply engaged with the material and the detailed analysis of the data using an inductive not reductive process. When researching a group of participants all experiencing a particular change or process, the researcher uses the detailed descriptions of experience from each participant, valuing that experience and looking across the group for patterns, convergence or divergence between individuals, that is, considering things which are similar in the experience of participants and things which are not the same. This microanalysis of individual experience allows for a detailed exploration of a slice of experience. IPA researchers have intense interaction with the verbal material from the participant and there is detailed examination of each participant’s recorded and transcribed interview. Each interview is examined in depth before moving to the next transcript. If the three basic principles as outlined

by Smith et al (2009, p.205) are adhered to, then IPA researchers may draw on a considerable interpretative range and make connections to an array of other theoretical positions as part of the process.

IPA is a favoured method used by applied psychologists, particularly in health-related research, as it has the capacity for making links between the understandings of research participants and theoretical frameworks of mainstream psychology. Brocki and Wearden (2006) undertook a systematic literature review of published studies using IPA in health related fields using “Web of Science” database 1945-2004. This yielded 52 articles. Their conclusions were that IPA is applicable to a wide range of research topics. They also stated that there was a “lack of attention to the interpretative facet of the approach” (p.87). The types of studies that appear in this review vary from researching specific disease perception for example renal dialysis (Smith, 1996), explorations of psychosocial consequences of learning HIV status in a sample of gay men, (Flowers et al 2003), the meaning of bodily changes for first-time mothers (Johnson et al 2004).

Although there are links in many IPA studies to sociological and psychosocial issues, this method of research appears underused in the realm of social work and social care. Houston and Mullan-Jensen (2011) argue that to date IPA does not have a firm foothold in qualitative investigations in social work. They go further to find this surprising, as IPA is concerned with eliciting from individuals experience the meaning people make of that experience by providing “thick descriptions of their perceptions.” (p.268) I have found no IPA studies which investigate the experience of individuals as staff members in social work.

I am undertaking this research over a period of time, one year, as transition is a process, a movement from one state to another. It is not a one-off event. The process of transition, the participants’ lived experience of transition, may have a range of effects on their experience, which may include social, psychological and emotional facets. Interpretative phenomenological analysis as methodology is compatible with my research.

### 3.7 Researcher orientation

The stance of the IPA researcher is to engage in open and exploratory questions which may reflect process, not outcome, meaning rather than cause or consequences of events. For example, how a woman's sense of identity changes during the transition to motherhood has been explored (Smith,1999).The stance of the IPA researcher is to be, according to Smith (2009), empathetic and questioning, while walking alongside the participant attempting to understand the experience from their perspective. The goal is to try to see from the participant's place, then analyse, illuminate, interpret the data.

Smith and Osborne (2003) refer to a double hermeneutic in IPA: that is, the researcher making sense of the participant who is making sense of their experience: a story twice told. The researcher is both like and unlike the participant. The researcher is like the participant because they share human everyday experience, a connection to common humanity; drawing on everyday experience to help make sense of the world. However, the researcher is unlike the participant as he or she can only access the participant's experience through the participant world view. This is then seen through the unique lens of the researcher based on the researcher's own bias. That is, the participant has the first-hand experience, making meaning of direct experience; the researcher is at one remove experiencing the participant's description of their experience.

Overall the researcher needs to have a willingness to engage with complexity and hold a "phenomenological attitude" (Findlay 2008, p.10). Findlay (*ibid*, p.10) continues "in this attitude the researcher strives to be open to the "Other" and to attempt to see the world freshly, in a different way". I, as a researcher, need to be reflexive about my own preconceptions and become aware of any bias which might interrupt what I see in the research data. Reflexivity is my ability, as Padgett (2008) argues, to examine one's self.

Silverman (2011) cites Whyte (1955) as using the phrase reflexivity in his appendix on methodology in his book *Street Corner Society*. Silverman (2011) argues that reflexivity is the researcher's self-aware analysis of the dynamics

between themselves and the participants. The critical capacity to make explicit the position assumed by the observer in the field and the way in which the researcher's positioning impacts on the research process. As part of a reflexive process, Lincoln and Guba (1985) use a reflective journal as part of building trustworthiness in the research. This is an introspective journal that describes the process of the researcher's thinking during the piece of research. The journal gives the philosophical position, the knowledge and experience base that informs the decision making within the research study. Other studies, Reason and Rowan (1981), Heron (1987), and Lincoln (2002), have discussed critical reflexivity as akin to an altered state of consciousness or high quality awareness, for the purpose of understanding with great discrimination subtle differences in personal and psychological states of others. Lincoln (*ibid*) goes further to say that such reflexivity is absolutely required to understand one's psychological and emotional state before, during, and after the research experience. Reason and Rowan (1981) argue that reflexivity enables the researcher to uncover and explore relationships and contradictions within the research stories being told. Lincoln (2002) continues that "the words transformative and critical embody the action aspects of research but also recognise the ability of meaningful research experience to heighten self-awareness in the research process and create personal and social transformation." (p. 337-8)

As a researcher I do have some preconceptions about the areas I am researching: newly qualified social workers, social work, transition and reflective practice. Therefore, it was important for me to reflect and consider these at the beginning of the process and throughout my work. Critical reflection has entailed logging my pre-conceived notions to ensure that these did not affect the analysis of the data, or that I am open and transparent in how they have affected my reasoning. My aim was to ensure that the voice of the participants was heard and that my interpretations of the data are clear and transparent to the reader. I am aware that all my history, culture and work experience that will provide the lens through which I experienced and interpreted the participant's data. As discussed, bracketing assists in this process. Larkin et al (2006) argues that what is objective and what subjective is not easily teased apart. Findlay (2008) describes the tension between "striving for reductive focus and reflective self-awareness:

between bracketing pre-understandings and exploiting them as a source of insight" (p.10).

Reflecting on all the arguments concerned with bracketing has led me to commit to a reflective process throughout the research that includes bracketing which reflects my method of study and my professional stance both in social work and psychology. Therefore, I have maintained a reflective journal that I began at the outset of the research and have continued throughout the process. An example appears below written at the beginning of my research journey following conversations with those who have known me and helped me focus on my pre-conception about this research.

*"I believe in social work and want the profession to grow and blossom. I believe that social workers can be helped to develop (and not get burned out) by the use of good casework supervision alongside workload maintenance. I believe that reflective practice is a useful skill for self-care and well-being as well as for creative casework."*

Further excerpts of my thoughts, bias and reflections appear as Appendix 1.

### 3.8 Sampling

Within IPA a sample is selected with care and includes individuals who share an experience. The importance of homogeneity within the group is important. If possible the group needs to share some characteristics which enable the experience of the phenomena of the study to be explored. In this research the sample was selected purposefully to gather a group of newly qualified social workers moving from university to gain their first qualified social work post. I chose to look at the experience of those who qualified in summer 2011. Two groups of student, those qualifying with a BA (Hons) in Social Work and those qualifying from the MA in Social Work, were potentially able to become members of a sample group and fit with Smith et al's (2009) description of a sample as those who can give access to specific experience/phenomena being studied, perspective not a population. A sample needs therefore to be specific to a particular phenomenon and can be small. The question to be asked when selecting a sample is which people can illuminate the phenomena of interest? In



this study the maximum sample was a cohort of newly qualified social workers graduating in summer 2011, 70 students. However, each member of that cohort group had a choice to join the research or otherwise. Eight social workers agreed to participate in the study.

### 3.9 Research design

The research design was developed to cover the newly qualified social workers' first year of the practice. Each participant would be interviewed three times, initially at the beginning of their first year, at the end of their first six months and then at the end of their first year. This programme of interviews was devised to enable the experience of the participants to be captured over time. Flowers (2008) states that to interview a participant more than once needs to have a clear justification from the beginning which is advantageous to both the participant and the researcher. Several interviews with the same participants have the potential to increase bias within the research. Flowers (2008) continues that in multiple interviews the participant and the researcher will be reflecting on the interview. The researcher needs to be aware that in inductive research the content of second and subsequent interviews can become more and more interviewer led. An advantage of multiple interviewing, however, is that the researcher can look at the transcripts of primary interviews to enable maximising "trust and rapport to be established between interviewer and participant and fosters opportunity for disclosure to occur" (Flowers, 2008 p.26). This links to bracketing and reflective practice: particularly, reflecting on one's own perceptions, conceptions and processes linked to research processes and analysis (Smith, 2007).

I undertook three interviews with each participant. This was to be able to track the participants' experience of transition over time. This enabled me to track changes in experience as individuals made the journey from being a student to becoming a qualified practitioner. I have considered all that Flowers (2008) has written about the timing and use of multiple interviews. Many IPA studies have used a single interview method however as I want to track individual experience over time multiple interviews is my chosen route to data collection.

At the three interview stages a schedule of prompt themed questions areas was created that would elicit the experience of participants. The first interview concerned getting some background information about the post that they had got and how that connected with their previous experience, eliciting information about their first few weeks and what they had been doing, some overall themes of the transition process. The second interviews at the end of six months asked initially about their experience since we had last met and how the experience compared to why they became social workers; prompts at this stage included the issues of supervision and reflective practice. The final interviews began with asking how the second six months had been and getting some dialogue about the overall experience. The complete schedules appear in Appendix II.

### 3.10 Analysis

IPA research is based on direct interviewing of research participants. Interviews need to be clearly recorded and transcribed to enable a detailed case analysis to be made. IPA does not have a prescribed single method of analysing data. Smith et al (2009) state the essence is analytic focus, “although the primary concern of IPA is the lived experience, the end result is always an account of how the analyst thinks the participant is thinking” (p.80). The focus is the researcher’s attempts to understand the participant's attempts to make sense of their own experience. The researcher wishes particularly to share and understand the participant’s point of view and has a psychological focus on making meaning of what has been said. In practice this means a verbatim transcription of interviews and a line by line analysis of transcripts. Scripts are analysed one by one to allow themes to emerge. After analysis of all transcripts convergent and divergent themes are mapped.

The process of analysis begins with a detailed reading and re-reading of the transcript interviews of participants one by one. The researcher makes notes and comments for themselves of things which strike them from the text. Smith and Osbourne (2003) state “there are no rules about what is commented upon and there is no requirement, for example, to divide the text into meaningful units and

assign comments to each unit. Some parts of the interview will be richer than others and so warrant more commentary” (p.67).

Having read in depth and commented on each script, emergent themes are developed. “Initial notes are transformed into phrases which aim to capture the essential quality of what was found in the text.” (Smith and Osbourne, *ibid* p.68) Themes which emerge from the transcripts are linked to the transcript through the use of direct quotations taken from the transcripts. The emerging themes from all the interviews are considered and “the researcher tries to make sense of connections between themes which are emerging” (Smith and Osbourne, 2003, p.70). As the themes cluster together some may emerge as overarching concepts, known in IPA as super-ordinate themes. The aim of the analysis is to provide a rich text which is transparent in the themes which can be followed, which leads to cautious consideration of similarities and differences and respect for convergences and divergences in the data. The process is iterative, so checking and re-checking of the scripts reveals themes both initial and super-ordinate. Super-ordinate in the context of IPA is that they are major or master themes. Each super-ordinate is summarised into a short statement to illustrate in detail how it applies to each of the participants in the study. Divergence is also evident and transparent.

The close research contact with the data leads to rich analysis of themes. Eatough and Smith (2008) assert that this type of interpretative work requires sustained immersion in the data, pushing for a fine-grained analysis and at the same time attempting to keep interpretative order (*ibid*, p.190). The analysis moves through a series of levels step by step, keeping close to the participants’ experience and moving through an interpretative cycle. The accounts that are constructed using IPA are written by being “stimulated and grounded in own (participants) experience and sense making and offer a deeper hermeneutic reading and indeed rather different from what she (the participant) might offer herself” (Eatough and Smith, *ibid*, p.191). The analysis employs levels of interpretation, beginning with empathetic sharing of participants’ feelings then moves through a series of levels to a more interpretative stance and then forward to a more abstracted and conceptual reading while still grounded in the

participants' words (Eatough and Smith, 2008, p.191). IPA participant accounts are directly traceable in the interpretative account of the research. The result of an IPA analysis usually takes the form of a more idiographic interpretative commentary, interwoven with extracts from participants' accounts (Smith et al 2009, p.200-1).

Eatough and Smith, (2008, p.119) argue that IPA gives central place to experience while acknowledging the multiple influences on it. Participants' experience is central, but individuals do have a context in which they interpret their experience. In IPA research the aim is not for one report to be seen as the truth, but one of a possible number of legitimate accounts: never the truth but "good enough", (Smith and Osbourne 2003 p.82).

Smith (2003) argues that IPA's unique contribution to research methodology is that the researcher has the opportunity to produce pieces of research work based on interpretation, which may go further in articulating and thinking than the participants themselves have done. In doing such interpretation it is crucially important for the process to be systematic and transparent, allowing the chain of evidence to be followed.

### 3.11 Assessing validity, reliability and traceability

Research needs to be fit for purpose. The method employed needs to be clear and offer rigour and transparency so that it can be followed and evaluated. The trustworthiness of the research is based on demonstrating rigour in the process. Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that ensuring credibility is one of the most important factors in establishing trustworthiness. Further, Lincoln and Guba (1985) offer a set of criteria to be considered in the pursuit of trustworthiness. Their aim was to find a set of criteria that would be applicable to qualitative research and correspond to the criteria used by positivist investigators. The four criteria are credibility in preference to internal validity, transferability in preference to external validity or generalisability, dependability in preference to reliability, and confirmability in preference to objectivity (Lincoln and Guba (*ibid*) p.113).

The notion of trustworthiness, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985), is how “an inquirer can persuade his or her audience that the research findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to” (p.290). Lincoln and Guba (*ibid*) argue that there is no one reality. A researcher must postulate relationships between phenomena and test those links. A postulate cannot be proven only falsified. If there are multiple realities, a way of making the research credible is to adequately represent these multiple realities. Lincoln and Guba (*ibid*) advocate among other techniques for checking credibility, “member checks” (p.313-316). This is where respondents are asked to corroborate findings. Further Lincoln and Guba state that the research cannot specify transferability of findings, the readers of the research findings need to do this. Transferability between research settings is dependent on the degree of similarity between one setting and another. The researcher needs to provide enough information so that the reader of the research can decide if the research is transferable. Lincoln and Guba continue, “since there can be no validity without reliability (and thus no credibility without dependability), a demonstration of the former is sufficient to establish the latter” (p.316). On the question of confirmability, Lincoln and Guba (*ibid*) refer to the extent to which a researcher can demonstrate the neutrality of the research interpretations. This means providing an audit trail of both data and the analysis, including the researcher’s own thought processes.

Validity, according to Avis (2005, p.12), concerns “the quality and strength of the arguments that researchers put forward to substantiate claims about reliability of their evidence and the credibility of their conclusions”. Validity is therefore an evaluation that is conducted on the research by those reading it and considering the arguments that the researchers put forward to justify their outcomes. Yardley (2000, 2008,) sets out a core set of broad principles that can be allied to qualitative research to assess validity. Yardley’s four principles are: Sensitivity to context; Commitment to rigour; Transparency and coherence; Impact and importance (2008 p.243).

Sensitivity to context involves a deep engagement with the existing theoretical and empirical literature relevant to the research area; whilst also engaging in consideration of the socio-cultural context of the study. This includes ethical

implications alongside the impact that a researcher may have on the participants. Yardley (2008) cites the example of a researcher who may be connected with those in authority: for example, the researcher has links with the school that their participant's child attends. This may inhibit the data collection as the participant may give socially acceptable answers rather than those that are personal thoughts. This aspect is pertinent to me as I work at the university; I hold a position of some power that the completing students soon to be graduates do not have. However, I was not involved in their training although I was a member of the same faculty. In this research I am a graduate student and the research is my research for a research degree. This information was clearly given to the participants. Appendix II has copies of the participant information sheet. Yardley (2008) goes further and argues that a commitment to rigour is concerned with the thoroughness of the study and attentiveness to the research participants (p.248). Analysis must be conducted thoroughly and systematically and in the analysis the researcher does not simply impose categories of meaning, but needs to be open to complexities and inconsistencies in the data, Case by case engagement tells the reader something important about the themes that are being revealed and that are shared by participants.

Transparency and coherence is the extent to which the study makes sense as a coherent whole. Yardley (2008) asks "How well the reader can see exactly what was done and why? Can the research process be followed in a logical step by step manner? Is the research clear in all aspects of the process from sample selection to analysis?" (p.250). In Yardley's view, a research narrative needs a coherent argument which hangs together with the themes presented. Finally, the reader must be shown something that is interesting, useful or important.

Yin (1989) concurs that an independent audit trail is important. This allows another person to follow the researcher's process from initial notes to final report. Avis (2005, p.7) writes "an audit trail is a record of design decisions, as the study progresses, selection of field role, choice of participants, ethical considerations and analytical methods". The participants' accounts are part of an iterative research process. The research commentary needs to be a fluid description of the process of research which includes the researcher's engagement with interviews,

the transcripts and thinking. The research only becomes fixed through being written up.

My expectation of this research is that the processes, procedures and the decision making within the research are clear to those reading the work. A clear and transparent process is documented throughout the research. The statements made are traceable through the data and direct comments are drawn from the rich text and codified transcripts.

For research to be traceable there needs to be a path or trail throughout the process of the research. An audit trail should occur from the conception of research, through data collection and analysis to the final report. This is part of the validating process. That is the reader having a detailed commentary on the process of the research and the researcher's part in the process as they walk alongside the participants.

### 3.12 Criticism of the IPA model

IPA is a relatively new methodology, with the first position paper being written by John Smith in 1996. IPA has been characterised by Madhill et al (2005, as cited by Larkin, Watts and Clifton, 2006) as a descriptive methodology and found that university research supervisors judged IPA to be one of the least demanding methods in qualitative psychology.

Larkin et al (2006) argue that the analytic processes described are largely unremarkable when compared with other qualitative methods. For example, Strauss and Corbin (1990) advocate analysis beginning with the identification of themes which are emerging from the data, the researcher tentatively naming categories aiming to have a set of multi-dimensional categories. It may be more appropriate to understand IPA as a stance or perspective from which to approach the task of qualitative data analysis rather than a distinct method. I accord with this view.

Collins and Nicolson (2002) are concerned about the dilution of data through in-depth interpretive engagement. They are also concerned about missing potential rich data streams that give an unfolding story in the search for connections and divergences across a data set. IPA starts with but should go beyond standard thematic analysis; however this was not observed by Brocki and Wearden (*ibid*) in their review of 52 articles. Carridice et al (2002) are concerned with generalisability of findings and the applicability to other similar circumstances and Brocki and Wearden (*ibid*) comment that analysis should go beyond the retelling of participant stories.

Validity of findings are questioned if one applies Yardley's (2000) view of objectivity of knowledge by using "inter-rater reliability", that is, the participant and researcher being the only way of agreeing objectivity, then the measures are only an interpretation rather than a check on objectivity. Brocki and Wearden (*ibid*) raise the issue of the preconceptions and beliefs and reflexivity of analysts, looking at data needing to be made more transparent and doing this may even enhance accounts. Considering the views of Yardley (2000), Brocki and Wearden (2006) I have chosen this methodology as it offers me the opportunity of using both my analytic and interpretative skills. Having read the work of Brocki and Wearden (2006) I am aware that the steps in the analytic and interpretative path are not always made transparent in the analysis stage of the research. It will be important to clarify what is interpretation and what is taken explicitly from the data set, showing both convergences and divergences in participant's experience. I will use bracketing and a reflective practice as part of my audit trail. These practices will increase the transparency of decision making and to add to the rich data of the accounts in the data analysis and discussion of findings.

### 3.13 Ethical considerations.

Ethics are a matter of morality in conduct of an individual and in the case of social science research this is the conduct of the researcher in relation to the research participants and the research process. Mauthner et al (2002) states that ethics concern morality and human conduct and in the case of research the moral deliberation, choices and accountability of the researcher in the research process.



All research has ethical issues to be considered in all stages of the research process. In the course of any piece of research ethical dilemmas can occur. Ethical considerations inform both the design, methodology of the research and the researcher's behaviour. This research will be analysing the work experience and lives of individuals. It is important to be clear about the path of decision making to be adopted throughout the research process. This allows the reader of the research to be aware of the ethical concerns which the researcher faced and the decisions the researcher made. This allows as the reader to understand how the researcher considered and worked with the participants as well as observing how the ethical decisions impacted on the research. I took a principlist approach to the research as described by Wiles (2012). Principles form the basis of the ethics pathway. The principles used as the basis of this principlist approach are autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence and justice. Autonomy is concerned with voluntary participation and informed consent of the participants and with matters concerning confidentiality and anonymity of participants. Beneficence is focused on the will to do good. Non-maleficence is avoiding harm to participants; and finally justice concerns ensuring benefits and burdens are distributed equally. Justice has within it awareness of power differences in the research between researcher and research participant. These principles in themselves do not solve ethical issues but the application of these principles guides decision making.

Brinkman and Kvale (2008) argue that research has within it "*fields of uncertainty*" (p.265); that is "problem areas that should be continually addressed and reflected upon." (p.265). They continue that instead of trying to solve all possible ethical concerns at the beginning of a project, the researcher should remain open to dilemmas and issues that arise throughout the research process. Sometimes there will be more than one way of solving an ethical dilemma because often such dilemmas are not routine. These principles are not in a hierarchical order so no one principle is stronger or more important than another. However consideration of issues using these principles will inform others of how ethical decisions were made. These principles form part of the ethical code of the British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy of which I am a member and apply these principles in making in ethical decisions in my clinical work.

The decision making will also be informed by consideration of care for the research participants. This is informed by feminist literature, particularly Gilligan (1982) who advocated an ethics of care based on compassion and care. This recognises the relationality and interdependence of the researcher and the participants. The basis of the decision making in this approach is care to the individual and not the application of universal rules. This approach has been criticised. Dunscombe and Jessop (2002) argue that this faking of friendship and commodification of rapport can neutralise concerns for ethics. The showing of empathy may circumvent a participant's informed consent and persuade interviewees to disclose more than they may have wanted to.

I am aware that in seeing my respondents over an extended period of time and with the interviewing skills and techniques that I have as a therapist I need to regularly reflect while in the interview process about whether the line of discussion I am following is for the benefit of my research and not in the interests of the respondent. For example, am I leading and deepening the discussion into an area that the participant is not comfortable with and would prefer not to develop? I need to be vigilant and should not try to get behind the defences of my participants. Fog (2004 cited by Brinkman and Kvale 2008) refers to this as the therapist-researcher creating rapport to get through participants' defences, serving as a Trojan horse to get inside a person's life where they have not been invited. That is, techniques that are ethical in a therapeutic relationship, client and therapist, may be ethically questionable in a researcher and research participant relationship.

I will be researching within social care and this as a field of occupation often has within it ethical dilemmas for those who are engaged in it. Although I am not looking specifically at social work practice issues, participants may discuss matters which raise ethical dilemmas. I am aware that as a researcher I am still bound by general legislation as well as my own professional codes as a social worker and a psychotherapist; therefore I might be required to reveal my sources if, for example, an active child abuse was reported during a research interview and the worker was not going to do anything about this. In this instance the care of the child, even though I do not know them, would outweigh my duty of care to the research participant. This is why I have chosen the principalist route: although

I will hold a perspective of care for the individual participants, this will not be the overriding decision making principle.

This research was carried out under the auspices of a Higher Academic Institution and subject to strict ethical guidelines that are in place to protect the participants of the research. The research proposal was presented and accepted by the ethics panel of the faculty of health and social care and education at Anglia Ruskin University in April 2010. This panel oversees all research in the faculty. In particular the panel were concerned that I had considered all aspects of distress that this research might spark in the participants. The ethics panel needed to be assured that all measures have been taken to minimise any risk to participants and that I had considered how I would deal with an incident of distress if it occurred. Following the ethical agreement my supervisory team quality-assured the ethics of the research through regular supervisory sessions.

A particular issue that arises at the beginning of this research is the issue of power. I am a member of staff researching the experience of people who, at the beginning of the research, were students of the university at a time prior to formal qualification and graduation. I teach in the same faculty as the cohort of students was taught. It could be seen that my status might mean that individuals felt obliged to take part in my research. To minimise this, I did not have any direct contact with this cohort group and all introductory contacts were made through the course leaders. This was followed by e-mail contact.

I am also aware that these are newly qualified practitioners and as such may feel new and out of their depth in the job that they are doing. This might give rise to feelings of inadequacy and failure. Also, they may tell me something about their practice not shared elsewhere. As already stated, I am clear that any serious matter that a participant may raise would need to be considered in the light of my ethical principles and professional code as a psychotherapist, which highlights the welfare of individuals and others they come into contact with and this may necessitate a breach of confidentiality in regard to the research. These matters have been shared with participants. I had familiarised myself with the staff

counselling facilities within the Local Authorities and other channels open for discussing practice matters for newly qualified workers.

The research has been approved by the Anglia Ruskin University faculty Research Ethics Panel on 29/4/2011. Participants have willingly chosen to participate in the research and are aware that they can withdraw at any time from this study or stop any of the interviews. I would consult with the participants if they choose to withdraw and ask if their collected data could be used in the research. Their views would be honoured. Once the research has been written up it will not be possible to withdraw individual data. All information sent to research participants and examples of research consent forms appear in Appendix II.

## **Part 2 Fieldwork**

### **3.14 Cohort group**

The cohort group for this research was drawn from the group of social work students who graduated from Anglia Ruskin University Chelmsford Campus in summer 2011. This group of students included those who have studied a BA pathway and those who studied an MA pathway. Within the group of students there were individuals who had been sponsored by their employer to undertake the social work training, known as sponsored students, and those who were self-funding.

Following approval from the Faculty of Health and Social Care research approvals panel and Faculty Ethic Panel, the cohort group were contacted via e-mail. The initial e-mails were sent by the course tutors for the BA and MA student group, which introduced the researcher to the group and attached copies of a participant information sheet, a questionnaire, consent form and a slip to be returned to the researcher either by e-mail or in the post with the questionnaire agreeing to participate in the research project. All research information, a copy of the consent form and the questionnaire appear in Appendix II.

54 students were contacted by the course tutors. This first e-mail was followed up by me with two subsequent e-mails. The return of questionnaires was disappointing. I received ten completed questionnaires and eight individuals said that they were prepared to be interviewed. These eight people became my sample. These eight willing participants were contacted by e-mail and interview times were made. All students were sent an e-mail thanking them and wishing them well for their onward professional journey.

### 3.15 Sample

This sample was self-selecting. The eight people came from the BA and the MA programmes, four from the BA pathway and four from the MA programme. There were two men and six women. Four individuals were self-funding and four were sponsored graduates. Four participants were to be working in adult services and four in child care services

### 3.16 Context

The political context is important as this research coincided with the Government in October 2010 announcing local authority spending caps that led to reviews of social service provision. For those who had not been sponsored this meant that there was little job choice. For those who were looking for jobs for the first time, there were very few jobs that they could apply for. Most vacancies were not open to newly qualified social workers. The initial e-mail, inviting students to participate in the research, was sent after the lecture programme was completed. The original plan was that the researcher would be introduced to students by their course tutors; however, this was not possible due to the timing of the research gaining ethical approval and the ending of the teaching semester. Unfortunately the initial e-mail coincided with the students completing studies and looking for employment. Some members of the cohort were finishing dissertations and assignments; others were completing professional placement hours and portfolios. The researcher therefore could not introduce her research personally and she had not fully appreciated the effects of the spending caps on the job

market for newly qualified workers. These two factors contributed to the lack of take-up by the student group.

### 3.17 Interviews

The interviews were semi structured to ensure that the researcher could gain as much information about the transition experience as possible. The scheme for each of the interviews appears as Appendix II

Participants were clear from the participant information that the researcher would be following them through their first year in practice. This meant that they would be interviewed three times during the year. Participants were given the option of workplace interviews or interviews at the university. Six out of eight first interviews took place at the university. All participants kept their appointments and all sessions were digitally recorded. Each session lasted a minimum of an hour and a maximum of an hour and a half. As all those who had agreed to take part in the research were at different stages of getting a job, the first interviews took place over a period of 7 months. These interviews took place between May and October 2011.

At the end of each first interview the timing of the next interview was discussed. The agreed method of contact to set times and dates for follow up interviews was e-mail.

The second round of interviews followed the same formula as the first. It stretched from October 2011 till February 2012

The third round of interviews began in May 2012 and was planned to end in November 2012. However, two members of the sample who had been unable to find qualified social work posts on leaving university took unqualified work. In summer 2012 both of them secured qualified posts and wanted to continue in the research so the final round of third interviews finished in September 2013.

Each recorded interview was transcribed by the researcher.

### 3.18 Analysis

The interviews completed with participants were digitally recorded and then transcribed as a verbatim account by the researcher. Each interview was given an alphabetic code. Initially this was A-H. I was then made aware that some participants would know each other and if they read the research may know that a particular person was interviewed first so I re-coded the participants with a randomly assigned alphabetic letter taken from the middle of the alphabet. When quotations appear in the text the letter always refers to the same participant, the first number refers to the first, second or third interview and the final number to the line in the transcript.

“I am very lucky to be in work right now and don’t lose sight of that” P.2.128

This is taken from the second interview with participant P, line one hundred and twenty eight of the transcript.

Wherever possible I have tried not to use data that might compromise confidentiality, and as this research is not about client material or case work decision making all client material has been eliminated from the data presented.

### 3.22 Coding

Each participant’s interview was analysed individually. Individual transcripts were read to get an overall sense of what the participant was explaining about their experience. A line by line analysis was then carried out noting the themes that were emerging for each participant. An analysis of each transcription being completed before analysis began of the next script in order that individual attention was paid to the complex material that was being shared. As far as possible this ensured that the researcher was devoted to one person’s experience at a time.

Each transcript was then revisited and open coded. The main influence on this first round of coding were the questions I had asked during the interviews. This

initial coding offered a way of marshalling the data, allowing possible patterns and common themes to emerge. The words and phrases were taken directly from the transcripts.

Tables of the main themes identified at each of the three interview stages appear in Appendix III as Tables one, two and three.

For each participant a vignette and a small case study was drawn up to capture the journey of their experience over the course of three interviews during their first qualified year of practice. Vignettes appear in Results, chapter 4; extracts from the case studies are used in the Results, chapter 4; and discussion in chapter 5. The case studies appear in full in Appendix IV. All participants excepting one were sent copies of the vignettes to ensure that they were anonymised sufficiently for the participant to feel that their identity was not compromised. The one person who had not replied to e-mails about the last interview did not see their vignette so this is kept to sparse anonymous details.

One aspect of the analysis that became clear was the emotional content of words and phrases that had been used throughout the interviews. I went through the interviews looking carefully for emotional themes and language. Each interview did reveal such themes, some more than others, but all interviews at all stages did contain emotional words and themes. These were then tabulated for each stage of the process and appear as Tables four, five and six in Appendix III.

### 3.20 Ending

Once the research had been completed, written up and finalised all the participants who had indicated their interest in the outcomes of the research were sent the abstract, the conclusions and recommendation of the study and were given the opportunity to receive the entire thesis if they chose to do so.



### 3.21 Summary

To reiterate, the research topic that interests me is concerned with an individual's experience of transition as they move from university training to being a newly qualified social worker in a professional practitioner job. This is about individual experience of a specific process of transition over the period of one year. This timeframe is important as it allows individuals to experience their new profession over time to be able to reflect and consider the process. A shorter period of time would not give that time for reflection and digestion of the experience. If too long a period of time is given between starting the process and transition, then reflecting the initial experience may be lost as further experiences overlie the initial ones. A phenomenological and hermeneutic method fits my study. A research approach which combines these ideas is Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.

One university gave access to a large potential respondent group which included students following the BA and MA pathway. The sample was self-selecting the researcher having no direct connection with the participants until they had agreed to become part of the sample group.

## **Chapter 4: Results**

### **4. Introduction**

These results are my interpretation of the data collected, using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), from the eight participants over three interviews in their first year of practice post-graduation as qualified social workers. An overview of IPA methodology and my fieldwork appears in chapter 3, the previous chapter.

The following sections consider each of the three interviews in depth, drawing out the main themes that emerge from the data. This method of data presentation came out of the analysis. It was apparent that the first interviews followed quite closely the semi-structured interview areas of interest. The participants followed the researcher's lead and did not include much material that had not been directly prompted by the researcher's inquiries. As the interviews progressed and the participants settled into their jobs, their responses and information shared became less homogeneous. The second and third interviews were more focused on process and individual experience of being a social worker. This finding does not accord with the work of Flowers et al (2008), who argues that the more interviews that a researcher has with a particular participant the more research-led the interviews are. This is not my experience: in this research study, the more interviews, the more the participants contributed.

The research interviews did not only give information and views about the newly qualified social workers experience but also about the emotional impact of this experience. I was aware of the wide use of emotional language by the participants during the course of interviewing and as I transcribed the interviews. I realised that this pointed to an emotional component to their journey of transition. The importance of this material was such that I made the decision to tabulate these emotional themes alongside the main themes from the data. Each script was considered first for the main themes and then the same material was analysed looking at the emotional themes that were presented by each person. These tables reveal the changing emotions of the participants at the different interview

stages. This suggests an emotional path along which participants are moving, unique to each individual but having some shared strands when all eight interviews are considered together. These findings accord with the psychological researchers and theorists who have modelled different ways of considering transition: Erickson (1950), Parkes (1971), Golan (1981), Nicholson and West (1988), Bridges (2004, 2009) (see chapter 2, part 1). Nicholson and West's (1988) and Bridges' (2004, 2009) theories focus on the feelings that are present during transition and particularly cite anxiety, loss, and disorientation. These feelings require an adaption and a reorganisation of both the individuals' inner psychological world, as outlined by Adams et al (1976) and Sugarman (2010), and their outer world. In my research that is taking hold of the role of professionally qualified social worker and all that that brings with it.

Tables 1-6 covering the main themes and emotional themes from all three interview stages form Appendix III. The structure of the tables is to show both convergent and divergent themes. Each participant is identified by their code letter for example P; the columns house the themes I have taken from that person's transcribed interview. Convergent themes can be seen by reading across the eight columns, divergent themes towards the end of each column. Below, Table 2 is an example of the emotional words from the first interview of two participants, P, an adult services worker, and R, a child care worker (see 4.01 for vignettes of all eight participants).

Table 2 Example of the emotional words used in interview one

<b>1P</b>	<b>1R</b>
Anxiety	Anxiety
Disappointment	Disappointment
Excitement	Excitement
Hope	Hope
Unknown	Not knowing
Insecure	Insecure /Unsafe
Frustration	Shock
Anger	Fears
	Worry
	Euphoria
	Relief
	Resignation

#### 4.0.1 Introduction of participants.

Below is a vignette of each the eight participants drawn from the initial questionnaire that was completed as part of being recruited as a participant and information shared in the interview process. The vignettes have been shared with the participants to ensure anonymity. However, one participant did not take part in the final round of interviews, nor did she answer e-mails sent to even though receipts were returned showing the e-mails had been received and read. Therefore she did not see her brief vignette. In the interests of anonymity references to named local authorities have been removed.

M, female in her early 40s, is sponsored by child care services, having been a support worker in child care services. She completed the BA social work pathway. At the time of the first interview she is awaiting a work placement having had a period of sick leave. She has received sparse information from her employer about the process of being placed in a job and has had no details about the newly qualified scheme. She is aware from friends and university colleagues that there are going to be major changes in the county child care services.

N, male in his early 30s, graduated with a BA in social work and was a self-funding student. He had found it hard to find a social work job. N gained a post in a child care team six months after graduating and at the time of the first interview was awaiting clearance following references checks to start work. Prior to training he had no experience of social care except as a volunteer in a contact centre.

S, female in her mid-20's, graduated with a BA in social work and was a self-funding student. She has found employment in a qualified practitioner post in a local county council adult services team for people with disabilities. In the course of the research S moved to New Zealand and the third interview was conducted by skype.

T, female in her late 40's, was a self-funding student graduated with a BA in social work. She had left a career in adult education to retrain as a social worker. For her

first year after qualification she had an unqualified post in the district council where she had been a student on placement. The lack of posts to apply for came as a shock because before beginning her training she did look to see what job opportunities there would be and at that time there were many posts available. At the end of her first year she was successful in obtaining a qualified social worker's post.

W, female in her mid-20's, was a self-funding student who graduated with an MA in social work. At the beginning of the research W was working in a project in the private and voluntary sector which focused on drug and alcohol issues. She worked in the project for her second year placement and at the end of her placement was asked if she would like to stay on. She agreed and took a part time contract three days a week. Alongside this she worked in a residential unit for older people part-time, then became a community support worker for older people on a part-time basis. None of these posts were for qualified social work practitioners. After one year W gained a qualified social work post working for another drugs and alcohol voluntary organisation in London.

P, male in his late 20's, graduated with an MA in social work and was a sponsored student from adult services. As a sponsored student he knew that he would be returning to the adult service sector; however, he did think that he would be given some choice of team on his return. He returned to the team where he had been an unqualified worker and was given no choice to be elsewhere. P did not object to this as he enjoyed working in the service area of learning disabilities.

R, female in her mid-40's, graduated with an MA in social work and was sponsored from children's service having previously worked as an education welfare officer. As a sponsored student she knew that she would be returning to the child care service sector, but thought she would have some choice in her work placement. This participant at the beginning of the research was working in an assessment team within children's services. At the end of her first year she transferred to a fostering team.

V, female in her late 20's was a sponsored student from child care services graduating with an MA in social work. V was placed in a front-line children and family's assessment services post. V knew that she would have little choice in her work placement. V was not available for a final interview and did not return e-mail requests for contact.

#### 4.1 First interview

This first interview followed the interview schedule closely. The schedule for this appears as Appendix II. The subject areas were drawn from my literature review. The first interview did not flow as easily as subsequent interviews; this was a new situation for all concerned and there were nerves and excitement on both sides of the interview. The unfamiliarity was somewhat mediated as six of the interviews took place at the university in a faculty building, a place that was familiar to both the researcher and the participants.

The emerging themes for this interview were: Beginnings; Placement experience and current job; Induction including the newly qualified scheme; Supervision and reflective practice; Role of the qualified practitioner. These will all be explored in the text that follows. In the first interview, the emotional language used included words that show anxiety and excitement, concern and optimism.

The context for all of the participants, whether they had worked in social care before training or not, was that they were all entering a new phase in their working lives as newly qualified social work practitioners.

##### 4.1.2. Beginnings

One finding from the data is that each person experiences transition in their own way. This individual experience can be followed through the transcription of the interviews via the language that individual participants use to discuss their experience. The journey is a unique personal experience. However, in reading all these experiences some common strands do emerge alongside divergences.

One of the surprising features that emerges from the data was the struggle all participants, whether sponsored or not, felt they went through in the process of securing a job. This is a surprising finding as those who are sponsored are employees of the local authority, returning to the local authority that has spent money on their training at BA or MA level. The sponsored employee agrees as part of this sponsorship arrangement to return to that employer for at least two years post-qualification; if they do not up hold to this contract they are likely to be asked to repay the money that has been spent on their training.

*“When I signed on the dotted line I knew I would be working for 2 years after I qualified” V.1.12*

*“right from the beginning when I signed an agreement for coming back for 2 years” P.1.10*

All the participants told a similar story of their journey to employment. The four sponsored participants were all from the same county council; three were from children’s services and one from adult’s services. All were disappointed in how their return to working for the county council was dealt with. The shared issues were that when they accepted sponsorship they were told that they would be offered some choice in the team to which they would return and the location of that team.

*“Right from the beginning when I signed an agreement for coming back for 2 years I always knew that I would be coming back. I would not have much choice when I finished, which in some ways was quite frustrating. In the beginning we were told that we would be given some choice but it actually turned out that this was the only post offered to me when I finished. So there wasn’t any choice there but I wasn’t really unhappy because I thought I had worked here before and I knew what the job would roughly entail but I kinda feel a bit like I missed out a bit on that freedom, you know, of being able to look at other things you know. My last placement was in child protection, and I could quite happily take a job in something like that and they asked me if I wanted to stay. They knew that I would*

*be willing to take the job but I had to explain that because I was sponsored that that was not going to be” P.1.10*

Each had to undertake a return to work interview and undergo an assessment test. The adult services participant P returned to the team where he had been an unqualified worker. Of the three child care sponsored participants two, R and V, were told that their jobs would be in assessment teams. The third M went to a fostering team. One assessment team worker, V, was told by her new team manager that the team was given no choice in taking a newly qualified practitioner and would not have taken such a practitioner if they had had a choice.

*“we are replacing agency staff who have been in the team a long time. To be honest with you the managers initially didn’t want us as they don’t usually have newly qualifieds in that team. Quite funny.... we didn’t want them and they don’t want us, a bit of a barrier to begin with” V.1.141*

The four participants who were not sponsored had a very challenging time finding work. Participants began looking for work in the spring of their final year while they were completing their studies and finishing their professional training placements. It was immediately clear to them that the job market had changed while they had been in training and that there were few jobs to apply for as newly qualified practitioners. This was worrying and anxiety provoking.

*“a very difficult process especially when you look at the county website to realise and there are only three qualified social work posts being advertised for the whole of ( named county council)” S.1.46*

*“It is been uncertainty which leads to stress and anxiety and emotional cost... you spent the last 3 years studying not get a job unless your sponsored by X (named county council) .....I’m one of the lucky ones I don’t think up to last week no more than 10 of us got a job very few” T.1.309*

*“I thought that if I had my qualification I could apply for any post but that is not the case. They have newly qualified roles in the county council for those who have*



*only just qualified and they get doled out to those who have been seconded first and then there is a rough and tumble for the rest. I don't really think I thought about it in the literal sense of how it would work" W.1.43*

Two participants did find work as newly qualified social workers, one in adult services and one in child care services. S, in adult social care, was in a team which undertook the annual reviews of individual service users' complex residential care packages. This post necessitates travelling nationwide.

*"I was one of the lucky ones. I interviewed and got the second job I applied for. I was interviewed, they phoned me the next day, I will be working with adults in residential care out of county, it is an out of county team... will be spending one week out of three away from home, not ideal" S.1.38*

The other participant, N, found a place in a child care team six months after graduating. His team is focused on the long-term care needs of children.

*"even though I wanted children I didn't restrict myself, I applied for everything that I can even looked at Y (county council) they had vacancies but only of internal applicants, Z (county council), in A (a town) and B (a London borough) and ummm C (a unitary authority) as they are a unitary separate from Y and Z." N.1.211*

*"I had first application to (county where he is working) in the beginning of February then I applied for a few all the way through, actually sort of found stuff but got responses back, thanks and no thanks, I was apparently in the talent pool but nothing was coming from that and the interviews were for specific positions. I got 3 interviews for Y and 1 for Z" N.1.228*

Two participants, T and W, spoke frankly of their need for work in order to pay off debts.

*"cos I am still living at home "when are you going to get a job, when are you going to earn proper money and pay back all your debts?" W.1.102*

*“I’ve got 2 children. I have just finished the course it left me with debt and I have a student loan of £20,000 student loan.” T.1 .240*

This led both W and T to take the first work offered. For both this meant that they took work as unqualified workers in teams where they had been on their final student placement:

*“she said, well, actually do you want to stay, and I was very up front with her saying I want the experience of getting a social work job, having that role and experience to go with my degree. I do love the team and the work and as long as you know what I am doing I am quite happy to stay here she said, no, that is fine, I didn’t have to interview or anything” W.1.9*

*“I have a job as an unqualified worker I had an interview on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of June got the job and started on the 20<sup>th</sup> of June.....it is only a six months contract but it is a start” T.1.6*

For both this post lasted throughout their first post-qualifying year. Then both participants applied and were successful in gaining posts in social care teams as qualified practitioners.

The situation of all these participants reflects the changing context of social work: changes in government funding of local government affecting the recruitment of social workers.

#### 4.1.3 Placement experience and current job

This finding concerns the importance of practice placements to employment. Learning in professional practice placements is a significant part of the training experience of social workers. The last placement prior to qualification is for one hundred days. These placements offer the social work students the opportunity to undertake some social work tasks in a supported environment, their work being overseen by a practice educator, a supervisor and a university tutor. The aim of the placement is preparation for working as a qualified social worker. Placements

occur in a variety of locations and individuals do not find their own placements; they are given out to students by the university in concert with the social services stakeholders in the statutory, private and voluntary sectors. This analysis shows that placement experience did not seem to be an important factor in the job placement of the people who had been sponsored but placement experience is important to those who are not sponsored.

All sponsored people knew that they would be returning to the county council and to the division, either adult services or child care services, within that county council that had sponsored them. Participant P had placements in an adult mental health team and in a statutory child care assessment team. He was returned to his previous specialist area in learning disability. This was in his view a waste of what he had learned in his last placement. However, it was inevitable that he would have to return to adult services as they had paid for his training.

R had previously worked as a non-social work qualified education welfare officer. This pre-social work training experience was seen by the placement makers as statutory child care experience so no statutory child care placements were given. Her last placement was in specialist child mental health therapeutic service.

*“First placement was in adult mental health voluntary sector, not working alongside any social workers and very much not a social work role, so I really had to keep sort of going that I was a social worker not a mental health worker how was my perspective was different as a social worker’s. Second placement not statutory either, which I was furious about, working in child and adolescent mental health furious that it wasn’t statutory, and they weren’t going to place me anywhere else. Although they were social workers they were not practicing as social workers, they were CAMS workers.” R.1.173*

V had no statutory social work experience although worked as an unqualified family support worker in a youth justice team. This work experience was deemed to be statutory so no statutory placement was offered. Before taking her post in an assessment team, she has never worked alongside an assessment team social worker.

*"In the course I have never worked in an area, I did 2 days shadowing before doing the course. I have worked with social workers but never in an area team so there is a bit of apprehension" V.1.48*

*"I do think that the people who are sponsored who are going to be in child protection, that it would be a good idea to put us in those teams for our 100 day placement so we have the experience while protected as students before being thrown to the workplace. When I was given my placement I did mention it and she was quite rude to me saying that I should be grateful for what I had got."V.1.71*

M was sponsored by child care and had no previous statutory experience, having worked as a family support worker in a child care team and as a foster-carer. Her placement experience was in adult care, the last placement being in a hospital setting working with elders.

For the non-sponsored people placements do seem to have played an important role in gaining a job. S had had placement experience of working with adults with disability and this was an advantage when she applied for posts in this area. T had no social care experience prior to training. She felt that her first placement had been wasted as she had come from a background of working in education and was placed in a school with no social worker on site. The school had little idea of how to use a social work trainee and she felt that the placement was made up as she went along. Her second placement was more successful in an adult care team working with young people in transition from child care services into adult services. W had no statutory experience prior to training, had a statutory placement in a family centre, and her second placement in a centre for working with those who have substance addictions. This second placement offered her work after graduation but in a job that did not require a social work qualification. However, this year of work did enable her to apply for a qualified social work post in another centre dealing with addictions at the end of her first year. N had no previous statutory experience, his placements were working with young homeless people and his final placement was in adult mental health. When looking for his

first job he was told that his experience in a statutory mental health team was taken into consideration when offering him a child care post.

Six of the participants were concerned with the plight of other newly qualified social workers who could not get jobs. There was both a sense of their good fortune and in some cases luck of being sponsored, as well as this being a sign of the times, and the change of context in which they were now working very different from when they began their training.

*“I’m getting a salary and hopefully I’ll have a job for at least 2 years. I know people who don’t have jobs and are struggling, I’ve just got to sit it out....not that bad, ride it out” P.1.140*

*“I’ve been really lucky that I got a job, the team were quite clear that they would not be doing any more recruiting, that they had managed to get the vacancy through just before the freeze came in. I have been very lucky in that sense a lot of my colleagues have not been so lucky, ....so it is very difficult” S.1.51*

The issues of a generic training have been raised by Blewitt and Tunstall (2008) and placement experience by Keen and Parker (2009) Bates et al (2010) and will be considered further in the discussion chapter, chapter 5, as placements and their impact on the future career development of social work students is an important aspect of the training debate.

#### 4.1.4 Induction including NQSW scheme

This finding concerns the lack of information that newly qualified workers were given about their new jobs and the support and training programmes that would be in place for them. All eight participants were given scant information about the induction that they would receive before they began work, and this continued through their starting phase of work:

*“I don’t know how much support that there will be, they have told me there will be but not how much or whether it will be learning as you go. I know that I start my*

*job on Monday, I am going out on a visit on Tuesday, that is accompanied thank goodness. I will have visits booked up for next week. I think it will be quite a shock to the system but I will have to wait and see” S.1.236*

*“Yeah, I was told to go look at the local resources that had changed. I did that in first couple of weeks and I have had training on the computer system. That was it in terms of induction” P.1.161*

S did not receive an induction because her manager was new and therefore unable to tell her about the organisation. She had worked in adult services in that local authority as a student social worker on her final training placement. If practitioners had had contact with the work area as students or as unqualified staff before professional training they were not given a full induction but were told to refresh their knowledge.

One participant, N, new to both working in the county council who had employed him and to the work sector, child-care, was given an induction to both the team and the county council.

*“I understand there is an induction to Y County Council and all being well it will appear” N.1.80*

The lack of induction is an unexpected finding, given reports such as Laming Inquiry (2003), Skills for Care (2010), and the recent Social Work Reform Board (2010) recommendations. All these reports recommend an induction tailored to ensuring an individual is familiar with local procedures and processes.

The newly qualified/ASYE programme are other areas where there appears to have been a lack of detail given to participants. Seven participants received little information about what the programme would entail or the employers' expectations of them during the first year of practice. The participants were clear that they should expect a protected caseload but the information about what that meant was unclear.

*“Set programme across adult services but doesn’t start formally till September. We have been given a sketchy idea about meeting outcomes but still waiting no details yet. I know we need to do an assignment and a portfolio, hope that is all there, but don’t know yet” P.1.110*

*“I made the assumption that I would be on it and I don’t know if that is right really. I think that X (county council) do it and because I am seconded and they have invested in me that I will do it.” R.1.141*

*“I don’t get the NQSW package as I am working in adult service. That scheme is for those working with children there is no funding for working with adults, I won’t be getting that or coming back to university or the certificate at the end of it” S.1.310*

The above is an example of the wrong information being given to S. She was eligible for the NQSW scheme and did complete the scheme as subsequent interviews showed.

Participants’ expectations were that the NQSW scheme would offer similar levels of support to that they had been offered during professional training. There were no differences in expectations of protection and support between those on the NQSW scheme and those who fell under the ASYE year.

Only one Participant, V, felt she was given a clear picture of the scheme.

*“I give them credit for that, the person sorting the HR, X someone, who will meet us just as we start, and then I think I am back here in January for the next NQSW programme” V.1.132*

Lack of information giving and sharing is consistent across sectors and teams, adults and children’s services.

*“I think it is hit and miss. From the people that I spoke to it seems more likely that I will be given cases of complexity and a higher number of cases and not have supervision as ring fenced as it should be.” R.1.346*

*“Well my manager says as a NQSW there is a protective caseload and the manager said that we will try to stick to it if we can but not sure what it is yet. Can’t promise so don’t know.” P.1.238*

This is an unexpected finding from the data given the importance placed by employers of staff having an NQSW or an ASYE programme. This lack of information creates a sense of mystery about how things work within teams for newly qualified social workers. This mystery includes the amount and frequency of supervision and what constitutes a protected caseload.

#### 4.1.5 Supervision and reflective practice

Employers have agreed with the Social Work Reform Board (2010) recommendations on the importance of regular supervision and a clear pattern of supervision that a newly qualified worker should receive. However, participants began work without the knowledge of who supervisors would be or what the frequency of supervision would be. The pattern of supervision emerged over the first few weeks in their post. For participant P this pattern was for objectives for the year ahead to be set before he had had the name of his supervisor or been told when he could expect supervision. His first research interview took place a month after he took up his post and he had no supervision and none was planned.

*“I have had a couple of meetings, first week and weeks later, with my line manager to look at my performance.... objectives’ setting has started, but I haven’t had clinical supervision.” P.1.91*

Participant S had only experienced case supervision while on her professional training placements. That is, supervision that checked her decision-making, not focused on her development or well-being in the placement. Her expectation was that supervision in her new post would also focus on decision-making, and not her progress as a practitioner or having space to holistically reflect about her work with her supervisor. In fact she was near the end of her training before she realised that there were other types of supervision that enabled you to reflect on



your work and your part in the social work process alongside space to discuss and consider the effects of social work on her as an individual.

*“I have only ever had case supervision. It has always been limited on time and the supervisor was always keen to get out because they had a million and one other things to do.” S.1.440*

*“I don’t think, based on my previous experience, don’t have high hopes of using supervision for reflective practice” S.1.456*

R had had solid reflective supervision on placement and was hoping (but not hopeful) that this would continue in the workplace.

*“I asked about supervision which is again quite important to me and again it was quite an interesting response. Yeah, we all support each other, but nothing quite tangible about regular you have it, but as a counter to that someone else in the team said, you know whenever you want to talk to her you can, her desk is there and she is open for you to come up and talk to her. That’s helpful but it different. It is also helpful to have an allotted time and know that it is your time to explore something, talk to someone because that is about case decisions not about all the reflective stuff. So that will be interesting, what form supervision takes, how regular, see how ring fenced, I get the impression that it is not ring fenced it is I guess that it is not ring fenced so I will have to see. My dilemma will be having to digging my heels in and say that I need it to be, otherwise I think it’s unsafe” R.1.127*

This finding does not fit with the outcomes of either the Munro Review (2011) or the Social Work Reform Board (2010) recommendations or what is cited as good clinical practice, Rulch (2002, 2005, 2007), Taylor (2010). However, it does accord with the research of Bates et al (2010), Jack and Donnellan (2010), who both found that supervision is not consistent for new staff.

All the participants thought that reflective practice was important but that there was no expectation that there would be time or space during working hours.

*“no space at the office, all will be done at home” S.1.419*

*“Don’t easily sit next to each other. On placement we had the practice teacher linking theory and practice I don’t know if that will happen here, I think it is important and like it” P.1.338*

*“Not enough time, .... car journeys between visits” M.1.213*

All participants were aware that reflective practice was an important aspect of their work. However, reflective practice was also seen as something that can be done while moving between appointments or something that might spontaneously happen while writing a report. It is interesting, with all the emphasis from recent reports, for example Social Work Reform Board (2010) and the Munro Review (2011), that none of the participants spoke of a model or reflective pathway that they had learned in training that they would be applying when they were in practice. This will be explored further in the discussion chapter, chapter 5.

#### 4.1.6 Role of Qualified Practitioner

From the analysis it was clear that all participants had concerns about the accountability and responsibility that they hold for their work, now that they are qualified social work practitioners. Leaving university and getting the label newly qualified social worker increased their sense of being the person responsible for decisions and accountable to the courts and the press.

*“pressure is huge, that has also given me a couple of sleepless nights, what if I do something wrong” S.1.531*

*“Yeah, but it is all on the social worker’s head, always our responsibility. It shouldn’t be like that but that is how it is that’s how it was on my placements. To, to tie it all together we chair reviews, write it, action everything, and I think unfairly that the social worker is responsible for everything keeping everyone updated and on side.” P.1.365*

*"I'm worried about the accountability. This idea it could be my face on the news.... that was the idea of joining BASW, a union, they make it clear that if you go before the GSWC you need the support of someone else ... at the end of the day that if I did something wrong I'm not convinced that an employer would give me that support" S.1.534*

This sense of responsibility seemed to come to them as a shock, which is interesting since all had been on what they saw as an intense training course. However, all the participants thought that there was a disjuncture between the training course and the reality of social work. The main issue being the social work university training is concerned with principles and best practice. The participants said that there is a gap between what they have been taught and the reality of both what they experience and observe on placement.

*"... what was the point of doing all of that, and I'm worried that I'm not going to be able to use the skills that I have learned ..... if we were moved to these work streams to cut care packages we wouldn't be using the skills as we trained to do" P.1. 125*

*"in training, you're told, told, to do this or that like there are no barriers. You find this a bit on placement but when you get out there it isn't like that. There are criteria to be met,....thresholds to be met....the academic work doesn't prepare you for practice, I can tell you that" T.1.261*

*"They (service users) are being fitted in to what is on offer." T.1.282*

This theme is developed in subsequent interviews and explored in the discussion chapter 5, both in regard to social work practice Munro (2011), Humphrey (2006), and the nature of psychological transition for example Adams et al (1976), Nicholson and West (1988) and Bridges (2010).

## 4.2 Second Interview: Mid-Way.

All participants were followed up after six months of practice as a qualified worker and asked to tell of that experience. All participants remained in their sector of work, P, S, T, W in the adult service sector, M, N, R, V in the child care services. The process of the interview was similar; however, each participant by this point was immersed in their particular team and client sector so more differences of work and work pattern emerged. There were still convergences of experience. The overall themes that emerge are volume, pressure and change; NQSW/ASYE programme; Supervision and Reflective practice; Role and accountability. These themes are explored under the subheadings below.

The more emotive words used are shock, pressure, constant work, anxiety, responsibility, lack of support and no time to think. Participants shared a range of responses to this phase of transition, from feeling protected to feeling bombarded. One participant, P, was beginning to feel and be recognised as a competent practitioner by other members of his team. Others were feeling overwhelmed, V and M. This demonstrates the difference between participants based on work experience. A constant finding was that communication skills can be relied on whatever else is happening; being able to communicate seen as a top skill.

The main themes for the second interview appear as Table 2, Appendix III.; the emotional themes can be found in Table 5, Appendix III.

### 4.2.1. Volume, pressure and change.

Seven of the eight participants, which include those with previous local authority experience, were surprised and commented on the pace of change within their organisation. The person who did not mention the pace of work for themselves did say that they were aware that the pace of work in other places was fast and furious.

*“bit of a shock to the system I had no induction, day one I went in and by ten o’clock I had been allocated my caseload and bang that was it “S.2.8*

Six of the eight participants described the volume and pressure within the job as huge and a surprise to their system. Three out of the four child care workers describe the pressure as immense.

*“It has been quite a little journey, really. I feel that most of the time I am just marking time till I can get out, it is awful really, 6 months on. I really love the work but the volume and pace, I just feel that I am spinning plates all the time, I don’t have thinking time, reflection time, and I am being pressed to a less than good enough job, and I’m surprised about how disempowered, I feel the volume and pace I just feel that I am spinning plates all the time” R.2.8*

*“I knew it was busy and it is busy; there is support but not as much as there should be. The general rule is you come in, I’m usually there by 8.45am, get about a fifteen minute lunch break, I rarely get a full lunch break, and then you are there for a bit afterwards as well and you are still chasing your tail, there are not enough hours in the week to get everything done, and every week there is something different to do you need a case study on every piece of work, we are going to be audited to do this to that ( all said in a breathless way)..... always something extra that you need to do ” V.2.12*

*“Manic, that is the best way to describe it, join a team, run manic, that is what it, feels like... Yeah walk in the door and just go and do it.” M.2.4*

These accords with Healey et al (2009) who found that new workers were unprepared for the intensity of child protection work.

This pace of change is in all aspects of the work from government inspired changes which effect public sector reductions in budgets, to local changes within organisations, for example re-organisations in the light of new legislation or reports such as the Munro Review (2011). These organisational changes lead to staff movements, which impact particularly on those who are trying to find their way in a new area of work or locality, within a new organisation, and with a new professional identity, that of a qualified social worker.

The exceptions to these findings were N and W who both felt that they had had a protected introduction.

*“Good, good I spent a long-time not being very busy because of the nature of the post. I’m kinda between two agencies and like liaising that took for ever it was so hard so from September to December I had no clients whatsoever, and you expect like the first month or two to be a bit quiet getting use to a new area and networking, but it just went on and on” W.2.9*

*“I had such a slow start, I hear lot from the other newly qualified about their work pressure and stuff, my job is a lot easier, my case load is not as high and I think if I had to go into that I am not sure that I could do it as well” W.2.73*

However N did experience three supervisors in his first six months of practice. This was due to seniors being promoted to service managers within the county council which was undergoing a large scale re-organisation.

*“it has been as gentle an introduction as it can be. From some of the stories that you hear about here you are chucked in, here’s your caseload, I’m glad that hasn’t been the case” N.2.92*

This will be explored further in the discussion chapter with regard to being prepared for practice. Bates et al (2010) explored this in their research named “Baptisms of Fire”.

#### 4.2.2 NQSW/ASYE programme.

All participants were engaged in some form of an NQSW programme within their workplace. Seven participants were in schemes that had an academic element attached to higher education institution and a post-qualifying award scheme. All had a mentor/coordinator for their newly qualified programme. W and T were part of the ASYE programme which began in September 2012. T was on a scheme which had an academic award component and W’s programme did not. Within

different organisations programmes are administered differently but share some common components, which have been nationally agreed; for example, an employer's commitment to a 10% reduction in caseload during the first year of practice and some greater support throughout their first year of practice. For the child care workers this includes not undertaking Section 47 inquiries, which are concerned with the investigation of child protection matters.

There appears to be a lack of consistency between teams and supervisors about how the protected caseload is worked out and this caused confusion among participants. Although there is a notional 10% reduction in a caseload for NQSWs, participants never knew if their manager was sticking to this or not as they were not party to the number or complexity of work held by other social workers whom they work alongside. Some managers made it clear that they would try to keep caseloads in check but made no promises about this.

*"I am not quite sure how the 10% less caseload works" V.2.71*

*"Ok, they say you have support and a reduced caseload and that is 10% but no-one seems to know how's that calculated.....It hasn't meant much, mainly because no-one can work out 10% of what it is about. They say 23 (cases) is the 90%" T.2.16*

*"up again where it was. I am supposed to be having a smaller caseload so that is less complex but because no one specifies what that means nothing happens. It is kept slightly lower than a more experienced worker on the team but it doesn't mean it is a manageable caseload for a newly qualified worker, it just means that the box is ticked to say that I have a smaller caseload than other qualified members of the team" S.2.110*

*"as far as the caseload is concerned they say that you should have a protected caseload but not what that is and that each worker is different from the other so it is individual ~I don't think that I have a protected caseload and at the moment I have 39 cases open to me. That isn't very protected, I don't think ....but I don't*

*know if this is because I have done the work before, but everyone does have huge caseloads” P.2.57*

The support element of the scheme and the coming together of the newly qualified workers to meet and learn from each other was seen by all participants as positive. This meeting together felt like a regular asylum from the pressure of practice which allows workers to think, reflect and take stock. There were differences in how sessions are run and the frequency of sessions. Groups in child care seemed to be timetabled to meet more frequently and appear more structured.

*“The newly qualified programme we have to go to workshops occasionally, every so often we get together, all the newly qualified workers from adults get together, we have got like a portfolio and we go through the learning outcomes and we get together, people in similar situations, which is really good, and as part of that there is the expectation that you will be doing extra training and I have been doing lots of training, that is good” P.2..48*

*“Yes, we have a newly qualified programme in our first year with a supervisor who comes round and we have workshops every couple of months at the records office and there are work books with articles and assignments and a portfolio to do and speakers in like the family group conference, and you think, yeah, I might have people who could benefit from this intervention so it is handy or like external to (named county council) and we also have the NQSW supervision every few months the group up at X, (place of work) will sit down and have a chat, have a think about any issues”N.2.236*

*“I have normal case management supervision for the first 3 months. We had weekly ASYE supervision and group supervision every month, all the ASYE candidates come together.....Yeah, there is work to be done for that portfolio, that is not too bad as you are reflecting on the work that you are doing, that is not too bad.....we have academic input from X university, two teaching days, we have a 2-3,000 word assignment to hand in” T.2.42*



However W who was with a London borough had a very comprehensive package with regular supervision plus group supervision, skills groups, discussion groups and reflective practice sessions.

*“they are also funding me for my ASYE. I actually have 3 supervisors, at (charity) who like does the day to day line management, a supervisor for case management at the local authority, and I have an external ASYE supervisor who they pay to come and see me once a week “W.2.35*

*“we have reflective practice group once a month we have core skills seminars once a month, we have the training we are suggested to go on, and if enough of us go to a training he suggests we also have a discussion group afterwards as well” W.2.1. 43*

Seven participants had to present a portfolio of work for an academic assessment at the end of their first year. However the way all participants are asked to keep data is seen by the participants as being a less than good use of their time. The portfolios of work entail a lot of cutting and pasting of evidence that is repetitive and the learning is seen by the participants to be minimal. Three participants suggested that to write a reflection on their learning throughout the first year would have been more creative and held more learning for them as individuals.

Seven of the participants found that there was not time in their working day to complete the portfolio or prepare for the NQSW sessions. There was a shared feeling that the work was a chore which had to be completed at the weekends or in the evenings after work.

*“it feels like a chore, not helpful” P.2.347*

R and V were explicit about their lack of time for the programme.

*“To be honest I haven’t had time to look at them” V.2.409*

*“I daren’t take time at the moment because of casework” R.2.61*

These findings accord with Jack and Donnellan (2010), who found that newly qualified workers value time with other practitioners and Moriarty et al (2011) who argue that readiness to practice is acquired over time. The impact of newly qualified programmes is an under researched area in social work and the new ASYE programmes are too new to have been fully researched yet.

#### 4.2.3 Supervision and reflective practice.

Supervision and reflective practice at this point of transition are closely aligned to the NQSW/ASYE programme, as a part of that programme is the reduction of caseload and the set amount of supervision that an individual practitioner can expect from the first day that they are in practice. The NQSW documentation led individuals to believe that they would receive weekly supervision sessions, then fortnightly moving to monthly sessions by the end of six months. The expectation being that the gap between supervision sessions would grow as they became more confident and competent practitioners. For seven of the eight practitioners the picture was the same: they had supervision but there were gaps between sessions. The sessions, both in timing and content, fell short of the guidance documentation and for six out of the eight participants supervision was not seen as the place for reflective practice.

*“you should have supervision every week, building to fortnightly for the first 6 months, and monthly thereafter, but that hasn’t happened at all. There was a significant period of time when I did not have supervision at all but it is really hard to find the time as I am really busy and my supervisor is really busy”*

P.2.41

*“that in terms of supervision through my line manger as a newly qualified member of staff I should have been having it more than what I have been. It is more often than other members of staff. However, and I did have one, one supervision last week which was my first this year (interview was held in March), so it is not guaranteed to be monthly. I did highlight this before and did say I needed it more regularly, it doesn’t always seem to be a priority for managers. Say that you book*

*it for 9.30 am, you might not get in there till 10, 10.30, and more often you get rescheduled, most people expect to get rescheduled once or twice before you get supervision, so for me who likes to be quite organised, I come in knowing that I have supervision, and I have got half an hour but I can't get on because I know at any minute she could come and say that she is ready for me now, but when I do have it it is useful" V.2.47*

*"I have been there six months and have had three supervisions and another booked for the end of December" S.2.371*

For W supervision was provided by her line manager for her day to day work and then there was reflective supervision in a group with other ASYE's and sessions with an independent supervisor regarding theory into practice within her cases.

Clearly there is a problem in the workload of the supervisors if seven out of eight workers are reporting the same issue. It seems that the ideal of regular consistent supervision is not what is being experienced in practice. The importance of regular supervision is something that has been part of report recommendations over time: for example, Laming (2003, 2009), Munro (2011), and particularly the importance of the needs of newly qualified workers for frequent and regular supervision as part of the Social Work Reform Board (2010) recommendations.

It is not only the frequency of supervision that appears compromised but also the content. Two of the eight participants, N and W, said that they regularly received in depth case discussion and reflection about the work in the supervision time.

*"fortnightly until I have done 6 months or is it a year? Can't remember, then monthly, and it that time we sometimes only talk about 2 cases really go into depth".N.2.65*

However, one of these, W, was during her first year receiving a reflective practice supervision as part of her ASYE package; this reflective practice was outside her line manager supervision.

Six participants reported that their supervision was purely caseload focused. Their development as practitioners did not get seen as part of the supervision process. Issues of personal difficulty being faced by the individual practitioners which arose from their work were not shared with supervisors. Three of the child care practitioners felt that their supervisors had no sense of the effect that the work was having on them as people. R reported that sessions were not held in an enclosed confidential space unless she booked a room and her supervisor constantly took personal phone calls during the supervision time. This manager never asked how the worker was doing and was surprised when R said that she wanted a transfer and the work in the assessment team was not for her. R states that she felt unseen and unheard by her manager. She did receive regular supervision but it was all caseload-focused, looking at decision making and rarely reflecting on the process of the work, despite the fact that some cases were child protection matters which involved small babies.

V describes the effect that the lack of supervision she experienced was having on her well-being.

*“because I am not getting supervision that often, I am bottling up things and bursting into tears when I get there, which is totally not me, it is not in my character” V.2.58*

This does not appear to have been picked up or worked with by her manager.

M spoke of supervision being all about case management and no consideration with how she as an individual is dealing with the work.

*“he forgets that we haven’t had it, but it is all case management, he never asks how are you, how is the NQSW stuff going, do we need to have a chat about anything? He says things like you need to do a household review for that but he never says don’t forget you need to do this and this, for that he thinks when I go out the door someone out there will tell her and actually I want him to tell me ...I am disappointed because you expect in supervision, talking about your cases,*

*someone will say have you done that before? ...this is what you do, instead of me going out and asking someone else, what do I do now” M.2.121*

N had a different experience. He had reflective supervision as part of his supervision: however, he had had several changes of supervisor in his first six months and an inconsistent history of supervision in his first six months.

As in the stage one interviews reflective practice was seen as important but for six of the eight practitioners was carried out on their own, reflecting about the visit in their car on their way to their next visit. What is described as reflective practice is only a part of what reflecting on the whole of a case would include. None of the workers talked about the model of reflective practice they used or about the theory that was informing their practice. The notes that were kept were not about their own part in the intervention with the service user they had been visiting but more about aspects of the work they needed to recall for the case notes they would need to complete when they were doing their case administration.

*“I call it social work in the car. After a visit I will think about it in the car on the way back, sometimes I have a light bulb moment, she said this this month, that last month, this is not quite the right placement for this child, potentially that child shouldn’t be there, I do reflection in the car either between visits or on the way home. Think about things “M.2.193*

*“It has been in my own time, there is not enough time in the office, it tends to be something that I do while driving” S.2.174*

This lack of understanding about reflective practice is unexpected in a group of social workers so recently qualified and who all spoke of using reflective practice.

All of the participants welcomed the NQSW/ASYE supervision groups and workshops that were seen as a place to reflect on practice. This was spoken about in almost reverent terms and that this sanctuary was a luxury experienced outside the office norms. These findings accords with Jack and Donnellan (2010).

#### 4.2.4 Role and accountability

The label qualified social worker carries with it the realisation of the responsibilities of the job. The level of accountability and responsibility was an important part of becoming a qualified worker and a change from the status of being a student. All participants spoke of the level of accountability and how accountable they felt for their work. Although they were aware of accountability from their training and placement, the impact seems to have been felt as onerous. What comes across is a constant anxiety that something might happen if they are not absolutely on top of things and that they will be held responsible.

*“I am acutely aware that I am more accountable than when I was unqualified because before I could say I am not qualified, I can only do what I can do and it is not my fault, you can’t rely on that.” P.2.107*

*“your real accountability is for the service you provide” R.2.366*

*“The emotional baggage, have I assessed this and made an intervention that will hinder that person rather than support them, is there anything else I could have done? Another thing is the effects on family they don’t look at. The family wants something for their loved one and say they will sue you and you start doubting your decision, could I stand up in court, and you know, say what this decision is based on? Or why I did this or that” T.2.143*

*“because the main issue is things in the press, you see social workers chastised for doing something wrong or taking the blame. It is usually that one case note, you did not record and that worries me, did I cover everything?” T.2.153*

*“you have the responsibility on your shoulders as well and you have also got the conveyor belt type of social work. I think, the whole thing is about go in, do the write up, go to panel, get the service, close it and move on... so in that process have I done the right thing for that person because very often these people are alone and vulnerable” T.2.171*

V who had not had any statutory experience as a social worker before training or on placement began work knowing she was on a big learning curve. She had described her first experience of being on duty as being like a rabbit in headlights.

*“I sat there like a rabbit in the headlights panicking I was so scared” V.2.24*

Alongside this accountability goes the role of communicator. Seven participants were clear that the main skill that they used was communication. This role is not just in the obvious sense of being able to communicate with a wide range of service users; it was also being the person in the network, particularly in the multi-disciplinary context, responsible for ensuring everyone was kept up to date. The social worker is seen by other professionals as the person to chair and co-ordinate meetings, to write up the decisions and communicate these to all parties. This necessitates much administration to ensure the social care record is accurate and filed in the appropriate places and also to communicate with everyone else involved appropriately.

*“Communication in the sense of co-coordinating and organising. Even in circumstances where we don’t seem to need to be involved you always seem to be the person to call people back, make sure things are in place in time, speak to everybody, and if you forget, something will go wrong, you feel like you are spinning lots of plates, that is the key skill I suppose” P.2.147*

*“Communication is the one I most learned. In terms of things that I have learned it is the one that I most progressed in in my first placement. I wasn’t confident about practice but in my second one I have jumped massively in my confidence in communicating with people, and because that is the one where I have made this massive transition that is the one I value the most.” W.1.184*

*“Definitely communication and on different levels as well, on my caseload birth to 16 years old, then you have children with development delay and parents with low IQ” N.2.194*

*"I think sometimes the communication and I know it has been a factor in all serious case reviews that someone did not communicate to someone and I'm finding that how you might interpret something, not how they meant it that is a challenge."*N.2.139

All participants were surprised by the amount of administration that they were asked to do. Five participants felt that this administrative burden accounted for the majority amount of extra five to six hours overtime that were worked each week.

The working of unpaid overtime meant that some participants felt that within the first six months the boundaries between work life and home life became blurred or lost. R described feeling bitter and that she was aware that she had no resources left for her family.

*"quite a few little babies and the complexity so you need thinking and reflection time for that, need to be able to do things properly, not just racing between one thing and another. I feel so tired sometimes. I take work home to do because it helps my sanity and I feel a bit bitter about that"* R.2.25

Work was coming into her family space on a regular daily basis. Weekends were seen as places to clear the backlog of work before the next week. This was echoed by V and M.

*"I am supposed to work 37 hours and I suppose I work a minimum of 43/44 most weeks. If I have a bad week like I have a shared carer who can only see me on a Saturday cos she works in London and I live in x she lives in Y ( 80 mile round trip approx. ) and I have to drive to see her on a Saturday and I might do some work with the recruitment team, not get home till 10pm at night another day, and you know I have an early day when I have to be in Norfolk for 10am and in Colchester for a 5 pm visit, so on a bad week I might do 50-60 hours."* M.2.334

*"I try not to work at the weekends but you do have to otherwise you wouldn't get it all done"* V.2.28



Taking work home on a regular basis or staying late in the evening and working some weekends made it difficult for V, R and M to switch off from work. They all spoke of the effect on their home life, specifically their partners feeling that this was not how they should be spending their time.

*"If anything happens at home I just can't cope, I haven't got anything left. I would come home and the lads come home and I didn't want to know what sort of day they have had, I didn't care, that was awful. What I would do is come home, do an hour or two on the laptop, have bit to eat, and fall asleep on the couch." R.2.272*

*"It is not as easy to switch the brain off as I thought it would be. I have thoughts and light bulb moments when I am not at work and have to write it down because it works 7 days a week, difficult to switch off....which frustrates my husband" M.2.513*

*"For me I have always been able to switch off but is so (quavering voice) difficult to switch off, so for me I'll go home and have cases whirling round in my head, go to bed with cases whirling round, so learning to switch off has been most hard."V.2.203*

T and S in adult services also said that they had to work overtime to stay on top of the work allocated to them.

*"about 6-7 hours a week on average but more when I am away" S.2.196.*

*"my supervisor does come round after a certain time and get us out the door, she is not going home herself but she does speak to us, she realises that she needs to give us a push. She does look after us" S.2.237*

*"about 3/4/hours a week, I come in Saturdays sometimes to catch up with the write ups because the open office makes it difficult to concentrate" T.2.28*

W and N did not regularly work overtime.

A picture is emerging from the research findings of the majority of the social care workforce struggling to stay on top of the workload and that this has implications for home and social life. Workers' awareness of taking care of themselves seems to be obscured by the amount of work that they feel must be done.

R by this six month point was clear that a move from her frontline post was necessary. She was worried about the health implication of working under the kind of stress she was experiencing for a prolonged period of time. She was conscious that this pace of working felt unsafe to her and felt pressured to compromise standards of practice to meet the timescales of the department.

*"So I am left with the choice of whether I sign up to this long term or not and I want to sign up to it, social work, yes, but not the volume. When you are dealing with complexity and you have time to think, reflect, and plan, that is very interesting, but when you are dealing with complexity and risk and you are flying by the seat of your pants, that is horrible, then you think if the phone goes at the weekend what is that, or you think if something comes on, on the news. It hasn't all been like that but there have been times when overwhelmingly I am flying by the seat of my pants. I can't work like this this is not safe. Didn't feel safe for me, that is how you make mistakes, forget things when you are charging from pillar to post." R.2.405*

Many authors, for example Lloyd et al (2002), Coffey et al (2004), and Collins et al (2010), have been concerned with the stress levels of social workers and social worker resilience. Social worker well-being includes physical and emotional issues that social workers experience in the workplace and how stress can overflow from the workplace into the family and social spaces which corresponds to work/life balance. Where are the edges of work and who is the custodian of such edges? These matters will further be discussed in chapter 5.

#### 4.2.5 Differences between adult services social workers and child care social workers

There was a clear difference between workers in adult service teams and those in child care teams. Adult service workers are acutely aware of the finances involved in all aspects of services. For P this was particularly stark when contrasted to his last placement which was in a child care team. In adult services every aspect of the work that he commissioned on behalf of a service user has a unit cost. He is expected to be able to work out these costs as well as being able to mobilise arguments to a panel to ensure that the service users meet appropriate thresholds set by the local authority in order to gain a service. This was not so in his child care placement; he was never expected to know or work out service costs.

*“we do often joke that we should have done degrees in accounting not social work” P.2.246*

This was true across the range of adult services and departments represented in the participant group. The assessment work of the adult sector social workers is scrutinised by a series of panels to ensure that thresholds are met before money is released for services. This can be frustrating when for example you are faced with making the case for a taxi fare to get someone home from respite care. Adult care social workers spoke of using skilful behaviour to ensure service users got services; for example, putting work before panels on days when the panel chairs are known to be more inclined to agree particular types of care package. For example, a particular chairperson who is known always to pay whatever the cost of a care package for someone who is over ninety years old.

*“You learn how to get round the panel chairs. One of them will give anything if the person is over 90 so I push cases to her or find out when she is on duty.” T.2.206*

There is a general feeling in the adult services group that assessments are reduced to cash thresholds and not care needs.

S felt that her work of reviewing out of county placements for those with complex disabilities was important, but did question whether it was a social work task, for although she had to use her communication skills she was doing little social work and did not in an annual review visit have time to build a relationship with a service user. Her task was to ensure that the county council was getting value for money and that the service user needs were still being met by the placement.

*“to my mind it is not social work as I am simply filling in forms and asking questions. I don’t think you need to be a social worker to do annual reviews because most of the people are in stable placements which is why we can do annual reviews.” S.2.294*

In the child care sector people are less conscious of cost but there does seem to be rivalry between teams. The assessment teams in the frontline are seen by all participants as pressurised and dealing with high volume and challenging work. Fostering is seen as an easier option; however, that is not the experience of M who feels that she is constantly working and her job involves out of county travel. Working in foster care she feels that her job is not understood by other child care workers and therefore undervalued.

*“(referring to group supervision) we do have a chat about cases one person will bring a case and discuss what has happened so far what does need to happen and the theories behind that, and we tend to talk about everyone else’s cases not mine because I work in fostering and we don’t need to think about that...Those that annoy me most are those on the NQSW programme with me, they don’t have any concept of what the fostering service actually does..... child care teams see fostering as an easy option, if you go into fostering you don’t have to do anything. All that is seen is that my foster carers are looking after the children that they bring into care. If my foster carer is not doing the training to look after their child to understand that child’s needs and I am not discussing it with her then the child’s needs are not met. We should be working together, they should let me know if they have concerns, I should let them know if I have concerns.” M.2.206*

N, the fourth child care worker was clear that he did not experience the same pressures of work as front-line staff in assessment teams did.

#### 4.3 Third interview

Seven participants were in the sample at the end of the first year. V had not responded to e-mail contacts to make a final interview. The participants were more differentiated and spoke with more of a professional identity and authority. They were familiar with the process of the interview: for example, me asking a standard question concerning wanting to understand their experience of the period of time that we were exploring. The overall themes that emerged in this stage were NQSW/ASYE programme; Supervision and reflective practice; Role and reality of working as a qualified social worker; Images of the first year. The emotional language that emerges ranges from a sense of relief and increased confidence and included challenge, pressure and confidence. Individuals are also becoming aware of their emotional needs. There is a sense of a balance being struck between work and home life. The main themes appear in Table 3, the emotional themes in Table 6, both to be found in Appendix III. The theme of stress, well-being and transition, including having a safe base and transitional objects or anchors will be further explored in the discussion of findings in chapter 5.

The column for V in both tables is blank as no final interview was possible as V did not respond to communications to set up a third interview. I knew that she received the e-mail requests as I received receipts for the messages sent.

There were significant moves for two of the participants by the end of their first year of qualified practice. For R the end of the first year was marked by a move from a front line assessment team to another child care post. She felt the stress and strain that had been visited upon her was too great. She had enjoyed the work but the system was not one in which she felt enabled her to do the quality social work she felt that she had been trained for.

*"I don't think it would change. I was told to fudge core assessments to meet the time scale and I just couldn't because we have lost the point then" R.3.311*

*"If you break a standard that no one knew about you wouldn't get a hard time like you do if you fail to meet a target "R.3.324*

*"You can get sacked for missing a time frame but you can get struck off for not following the code. That is right, it is, it is more important. There is more to targets and timeframes than the business goal and there are reasons behind them, but if you fudge something to meet a target you have totally convoluted the point of it. So if this comes from this top down focus or maybe not so much so from Munro but traditionally this top down target driven agenda it has lost sight of this being a social work practice agenda." R.3. 336*

S had relocated to New Zealand and was working as a front line child care worker, a move from adult care services. S had a completely revelatory experience of induction, supervision, and reflective practice. First she was given a seventeen week induction which was formally constructed and used a range of resources from e-learning to face to face learning. She had been provided with a supervisor who had agreed a plan of supervision at set weekly times. She was given a tool called a case consult which contains a series of actions to undertake while reflecting on a case with your manager. She described a team where no decision is taken in isolation, no one worker is seen as responsible for a life-changing decision. Finally she was clear that the situation pertaining to work was that unless there was a major crisis then no-one was expected to work overtime; meal and coffee breaks were almost mandatory.

Change had been a constant throughout the period of the participants' first year. There had been continuing change both in policy and procedures and for some participants there had been changes in work location. P had experienced several organisational changes causing a change of location and three team changes in twelve months.

*"It's been like there are so many changes it has been incredible, I don't know how to describe it, you just have to get stuck in and you get bombarded with so much*

*work that you have just got to try and do as best you can, that is all you can do really, and with all the office moves as well. Challenging, I, I suppose it's challenging moving in with other people we did that once and then we moved again with other people and all the disruption that brings" P.3.19*

M had a period of some months working from home as her team had to move from their building for health and safety reasons. N had had a stable office base and team but the manager/supervisor had changed three times. All spoke of change as a constant possibility.

#### 4.3.1 NQSW/ASYE programme.

This research data suggests that a protected first year is not always experienced as such. Six participants felt that the NQSW programme had afforded them little protection. There was no clear sense of how their time for the NQSW scheme or their caseloads had been protected. P felt that his caseload was in fact higher than some team members and this was not an issue for him but he had not felt protected from the work pressure. P was glad to have completed his portfolio and have everything signed off and complete and that he was no longer a newly qualified worker.

There was consensus across the data set that the group meetings for NQSW's were good and offered a place to connect with other NQSW's, learn and reflect outside the confines of their normal office. Generally the co-ordinators were seen as helpful, supportive and informative. The assignments and the portfolio were seen as less helpful and repetitive. Again this accords with the work of Jack and Donnellan (2010).

One participant, M, was particularly anxious about completing the first year as she suspected that her caseload would expand.

*"From the NQSW co-ordinator a lot, she has been marvellous; she is the one who got me through the assignments. She has been brilliant this year, brilliant, and I think those who are doing ASYE are very lucky. Without her I am not sure that I*

*would have got through it. Work wise a bit less... they are so busy themselves, I have to go through all these outcomes, I think there are 48 of them, and my manager has cancelled the meeting 4 times when we were meant to go through them. He has to go through them and sign them off, twice he didn't bother to turn up, what is that saying to me about my value in the team, so he hasn't been as supportive. Supervision is just case management, nothing about how do you feel, what is happening for you, how are you, gets to the end he turns his laptop off and is out the door saying he has a meeting to go to and you are left and that isn't acceptable really" M.3.149*

Two participants were looking to continue advanced level training one to gain a postgraduate award, the other to complete to MA level, not immediately but over the next few years.

#### 4.3.2 Supervision and reflective practice

All participants had supervision. However, frequency varied as did the managers' commitment to this activity.

*"in my last team it was sat in the middle of the office next to my manager at her desk and she would take personal calls, usually one or 2, mainly from her children I thought bugger this but didn't say anything, but did then start to book a room so we were in a private space which was better. But it was never more than case management, so what have you done, what are you going to do, go and do it, and we took 2-3 hours just going through the cases looking at complex case decisions so I don't think I grew through supervision." R.3.204*

As in the second interview reflective supervision was rare. All participants said that reflecting on practice was important but this translated into considering what they had done and what needed to be picked up on the next visit to this service user. Reflective practice was on the whole a solitary activity undertaken by the NQSW on their way between visits or on the way home in their cars. No-one referred to using a model of reflective practice. W, and S when she had relocated to New Zealand, referred to their supervisor using a model for reflective practice.



S also referred to a template of reflective practice that she used and that was taken to supervision for discussion.

*“what we have now is what are called case consults and there is a particular template is used which is so useful. Basically you do a brain dump into a particular format which is about what your concerns are, what the grey areas are, what the strengths are. I find it so helpful and at the end of it there is a point where you draw it altogether and what practice tools are available and what you have used and things like that so you and your supervisor can then choose next steps.”S.3.72*

N has regular supervision every month to six weeks which is reflective; however, from his description this was an in-depth case discussion about the technical details of decision making rather than following a model or pro-forma to look at all aspects of the case, including the worker's thoughts and feelings.

These matters will be returned to as previously indicated in the discussion in chapter 5.

#### 4.3.3 Role and the reality of working as a qualified social worker.

All participants spoke of their level of confidence rising over time. Much of the rise in confidence came from understanding systems and the processes which follow interventions and decisions. This confidence is further boosted by being able to impart knowledge to others, either to people within the professional network, students or more newly qualified workers.

*“I recognise now that I have a bit more confidence and knowledge and feel a bit more comfortable. Before I might have thought that I have got to do something when it is not my remit to be doing anything... so if a kid is coming back late all the time I can get him to look at it but I can't stop him, just get him to look how this affects other people, I can't be with him 24 hours a day.” N.3.21*

*“Personally that I can do it....so much still to learn, you never stop learning, there is always something to learn; learn; like sitting down and learning different management strategies or about the needs of disabilities children, like peg feeds how to manage this and that, constant learning and reflection.” M.3.270*

*“It has been a bit up and down and I have learned a lot about myself, why something’s get to me and other things don’t... personal things about how I manage some situations and not others. I need to talk to people about it when it (the work) touches things from my past, it affects the way I can deal with it so the knowing myself is quite important.” M.3.289*

Although individual participants had had different learning curves over their first year, they were all agreed that the profession of social work was one where you were constantly learning and that this was an important aspect of the work. The participants tell of feeling like social workers after a period of about six months. From this time forward they feel more confident in their ability. P had felt that since about month five he was feeling confident and competent in his role. For him this was confirmed by how he was affirmed by multidisciplinary colleagues and how his opinion was sought by a range of workers in his workplace. The fifth to seventh month did seem to be important to all participants; it marked a time when they felt they were clearer about their role as a social worker and they were familiar with office procedures and systems that they used on a regular basis. Even those who were making another transition, namely R and S, spoke of their confidence as social workers, although they were both facing new challenges and inevitably felt like beginners again. However they did not feel as deskilled as they had done when moving to a first social work job as a qualified practitioner straight after university.

*“I do think that I was strong and competent at 6 months” R.3.135*

*“I think gradually more and more people look to you or ask you questions as they think that you might know, and when people in the team, people who have been in the team longer or seniors ask you things, you know that you are seen to be competent” P.3.71*

*"I think it is gradual you realise that I am competent" P.3.79*

*"looking back I felt yeah I know what I am doing now probably after doing it for a couple of months you know it you know the processes and you know what you are doing" P.3.90*

For M awareness of her growth in confidence comes in concrete ways: for example, allowing herself to take holiday from work knowing that while she is away things will carry on. She needed to acknowledge that she does have limitations and cannot work all the hours that there are in a day or week, she needs to rest and restore her energy levels. It seems that this awareness of her own well-being needs fits with her growing confidence to work with others. An acknowledgement that as a social worker you do have limitations and that as much as you would like to make changes for others you do need to have a break, rest and relax.

*"It would be a slow upward, a step up, then plateau, then up. There have been some times when I wonder why I am doing this as I am constantly tired but once I thought I was able to leave it behind it was much easier.... I had 4 study days for the first 4 assignments, just about to take some more for the second lot of assignments and have had 4 days holiday since I started. I have just booked a holiday for 2.5 weeks in January... I finally got to the point of it, do you know what I am going to take a holiday. I am entitled to a holiday and someone else can cope for a few weeks.....That really is a corner." M.3. 85*

Taking time away, both planned and unplanned, from work did appear to be an issue. For some people it was concern about what will happen to work while they are away. For others it was, time away is storing up work for that person's return. P was clear that to take unplanned sick leave is difficult as you know that your work will not be covered and the sooner you go back the better. He was aware that both he and his supervisor had recently returned to work too soon, him after a virus, her following a chest infection. For both they forced an early return because

they were anxious that their work would not be covered. In this example notions of self-care are not present.

*“As social worker you feel the individual responsibility work is not dealt with if you are away” P.3.215*

All participants felt that what they were learning in practice was the reality of social work, which is not as they were taught on their university training programmes. Training is about ideals and principles and is not embedded into everyday realities of thresholds and eligibility. Thresholds and eligibility criteria are mentioned in training but it is difficult to understand the reality of operationalizing thresholds and eligibility criteria until you have the experience of working with them.

*“It has been good, plenty of ups and downs but it has been good, been a lot of you know the more complex cases you can see the things that you were taught at university but you think that the thing remains that everything is resource led. Although you want to do more work the sort of team I am in is a quick turnover, go in, do an assessment, do an analysis, no resource to meet the analysis that you have made” T.3.8*

*“Yes because the reality of social work is so different from what I was taught, this lovely idealised image we were taught in university. The legal issues in the class room are black and white whereas in reality there are large amounts of grey areas” S.3.110.*

*“That the more cases, more work, you do, the better your idea is about eligibility. You get more baselines, more confidence in the assessment of needs, where it all fits, see the whole spectrum and therefore how to position cases. At uni we did do about fair access but not until you get the experience, it doesn’t mean as much, including seriousness and risk” P.3.228*

The same can be said for some forms of legal restriction, for example Mental Capacity Act (2005). It is easy to understand the legislation but hard to put into practice. University training is seen as a good foundation for doing the job as a

qualified social worker but because the training is generic and all jobs are specialist individuals do not have a not sufficient depth of practice understanding when they begin. There is much to learn to enable individuals to feel competent and confident, to do the job to which they have been recruited.

*“Training is a good preparation but it is not in depth of knowledge about a specific area, you learn the legal stuff, grounded in social work theory, but I now have specific knowledge of the client group - for example autism and all the syndromes.... learning about mental health as many clients have mental health issues, so I know about medication and the services available in the area,”*  
P.3.267

N, R, T and M were surprised by the amount of paperwork and computer time there was to be done in the job. These aspects of the work of social workers cannot be fully experienced while on placement as a social work student does not hold case responsibility and accountability. Therefore they are not responsible for all processes involved in the casework.

*“I sit in front of the computer a lot more than I thought... 60-70% of my time sitting writing things up there is an awful lot of paperwork”* M.3.208

*“I remember sitting here saying that just before I started, just going out doing visits and things, it will be nothing. I have learned it is more than that, I did think that there would be admin but the time spent in front of the computer doing forms and making notes and phone calls, I might get if I am lucky in a good week an hour or so a day with children if I try to do a visit a day, so 5-6 hours with the children out of 37 hours a week. You also have to include driving to and from places. I understand the accountability it is not proportional... but how else cos you can't have other people typing your notes for you cos they might not be coming to the case in the same way.”* N.3.205

R also felt the computer system was inefficient and inadequate for the range and types of work being undertaken.

Staffing levels are experienced as being very close to breaking point by P, R and M. They have all had experience of being on their own in situations where more cover was needed and where the office had been left understaffed for a day. This is a very anxiety-provoking situation and pushes workers to their limit. Here their experience is that practice is compromised and that there is a lack of management.

*“Because I have also been on the duty rota there have been a couple of occasions where we have been so short of staff that it has been me and one other person in the office and we have been bombarded, and it is not a nice feeling when it happens as you start to feel out of control, it has only been a couple of occasions but it is not a nice feeling... because of those pressures you are forced into bad practice and not doing your job as well as you could do when it happens as you start to feel out of control” P.3.173*

These findings are similar to those reported by Laming (2003, 2009) and this type of finding did trigger the Social Work Task Force which became the Social Work Reform Board (2010)

Six participants commented on needing to create a boundary between work and home and that this was a conscious process which happened as they began to realise their limitations. R's experience was that once she had made the decision to leave the assessment team her caseload diminished and she was doing less overtime, giving re-charge space at the weekends and in the evenings.

The need to have space to recharge and enhance well-being is well documented, for example Graham and Shier (2010) Collins (2008).

#### 4.3.4 Images of the first year

In the final interview I asked a question which I designed to enable the participants to come up with an image, phrase or metaphor for their first year. This was to try and move away from the familiar speech descriptions of their experience and to offer a more creative opportunity to describe their experience. I

use metaphor and imagery in my work as a therapist and find it a method which can help unlock expressions. There were a range of expressions, M's being the most graphic.

M had an image of a hangman's noose and suffocating in paperwork.

*"Sometimes I would say a hangman's noose... I find myself all tied up running around like a headless chicken what ones are most important to put on paper, the reference I need to write for the person who has gone to Norfolk, I am tied up in knots...sometimes you do feel like you are suffocating in paper work and you can't just save it in one place but 2 or 3 place. If you forget to save it here you get told off for it you have to lock the computer every time you go to the toile, you do feel like suffocating in paper but I still enjoy my job" M.3.232*

Earlier in the interview she described her journey through her first year as an upward path with a series of plateaus.

*"It would be a slow upward, a step up, then plateau, then up there have been some times when I wonder why I am doing this as I am constantly tired but once I thought I was able to leave it behind it was much easier" M.3.85*

T had an image of a baptism of fire.

*"(long pause) there would be two one for the baptism of fire, for the first six months is flames everywhere. The following 6 months there was flames but an arch going through it, there is always the risk of being hurt, flames were above and on the sides and as long as you kept yourself within the arch you wouldn't get hurt" T.3.170*

This image represented not only her feelings of being engulfed in flame at the beginning of her practice but also that the arch through the flames represented a growth in confidence and competence.

P also had a metaphor reflecting shifts and changes.

*“Changeable, a book with chapters, May to August, September to January, April to now this reflects the setting changes and moves” P.3.251*

S and R used graphic phrases.

*“Bloody hard work is the first thing that comes to mind” S.3.106*

*“Frantic because of the team and location” R.3.277*

N reflected on his relief.

*“I think a few words, suppose relief that I am still here at the end of the first year and I have not burned out or anything, you know it has been enjoyable and to be honest I get bored easily at work and I don’t get bored” N.3.252*

W had an image of her own growing confidence.

*“ Ummmm.....I think the main thing is building my confidence. I can see that building through the year and when I was at the crisis points, that is, one of the issues that I have had, that is the thing that comes up in all of them, how I am interacting with people and how I am fitting into the team and things like that.” W.3.86*

These findings I think give a snapshot of the emotional nature of the journey of transition that the participants had been on.

This chapter 4 has outlined the results and analysis of three interviews with the eight participants over their first year of practice. In the following chapter 5 I will discuss the major strands of these findings and the model that I suggest as a way of encapsulating the experiences of these participants.



## **Chapter 5 Discussion of Transition**

This chapter considers the findings of the data analysis concerning the transition experience of the participants. Throughout this chapter reference will be made to the experiences of the sample population and relevant literature and policy documentation. My interpretation and discussion is informed by literature from social work, psychology and organisational studies. Part one considers an emerging model of a transition process for someone entering the work as a qualified social work practitioner; part two focuses on aspects of the psychological and emotional journey of participants; part three is specifically concerned with the professional journey of the practitioner.

### **Part 1: An emerging model of transition.**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

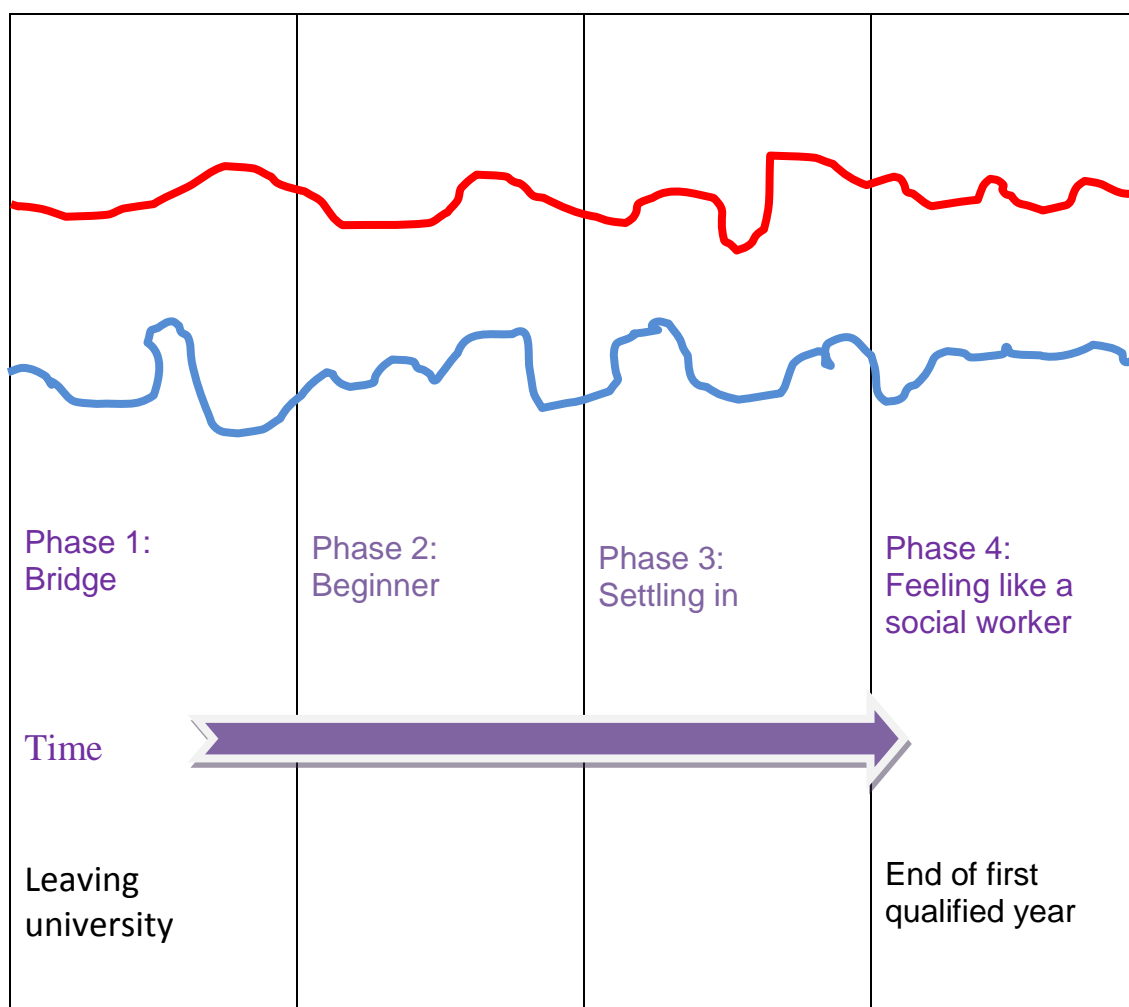
This section will consider an emerging model of transition based on the data that would suggest that there is a transition journey that is made from university training as a social worker, gaining a social work post and practicing as a qualified social worker. I offer an interpretation of the experience of eight social work graduates in their first year of social work practice based on semi-structured interviews. The analysis suggests that there are common factors to that experience while acknowledging that each individual has a unique personal experience of transition. From a theoretical perspective Erickson (1950) chapter 2 (2.2), p.14; Tynhurst (1957), chapter 2 (2.3) p.18; Parkes (1971) chapter 2 (2.3.1) p.19; Adams et al (1976) chapter 2 (2.3) p.18; Golan (1981) chapter 2 (2.3) p.18; Nicholson and West (1988 ) chapter 2 (2.2) p.26; Bridges (2009) chapter 2 (2.3.3) p.24 all state that transition is a process which has physical, emotional, psychological and social aspects,. Psychological, social and emotional adaption to the transition experience is necessary.


A model that I suggest has three strands which are outlined in Figure 7 below. The phased strand has four phases: Bridge; Beginner; Settling in; Feeling like a social worker. These phases take place over time but individuals move through


them at their own pace. The psychological/emotional strand is illustrated by a red line; the professional strand by a blue line.

A model of transition

Figure 7



Psychological/emotional strand of transition 

Professional strand of transition 


Phased development strand 

Table 3 below draws together three different strands and aspects of transition that I suggest emerge from this data. Each strand entire in its own right, taken together the three strands form a holistic journey of transition. They are like three strands of a rope. Each strand is strong and independent but also affected by the integrity of the other strands; one frayed strand weakens the whole rope but together each strand can affect and strengthen the other. Each strand of the transition can be

seen as having an independent trajectory but the different strands can affect each other. An individual might move smoothly through the phased transition to the end of the first two phases when a change of supervisor may cause them to waiver on their professional strand and create anxiety and distress in the psychological strand. Equally they may make steady progress in their professional life and in the phased strand but be feeling stress and anxiety about the accountability and responsibility that they hold. Therefore their psychological and emotional path may feel unstable.

Table 3 Three different strands and aspects of transition

Psychological/ Emotional Strand	Professional Strand	Phased development Strand
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Anticipation Loss Expectations of others Expectations of self	From qualification to gaining a job	The Bridge No longer a student and not in a qualified worker's post either.  Time range 3 weeks to 12 months or more
Feeling unskilled Fear and anxiety Fear of the unknown Need for reassurance	Induction and use of skills	Beginner  Time range first 6 weeks to 3 months
Shock disappointment Stress Overload Pace	NQSW/ASYE Supervision Reflective practice Skills	Beginner  Time range first 6 weeks to 3 months
Seeing routes through Some personal confidence and reliance Some personal satisfaction	NQSW/ASYE Supervision Reflective practice Skills	Settling-in  Time range 3 to 6 months
Growth in confidence More self-awareness of own needs Some personal satisfaction	NQSW/ASYE Supervision Reflective practice Skills	Feeling like a qualified practitioner  Time range 6-9 months

## 5.2 Phased strand: Phase 1: The Bridge

As I show in my model, p.144 and Table 3, p.145 the phased development strand has four phases. The first phase is the Bridge which is the period of time between knowing one has qualified as a social work graduate and being offered and accepting a qualified practitioner job. In this research sample this timescale varied from a few weeks to a year; thus reiterating the premise that phases do not have a specific amount of time attached to them. The task in phase one psychologically and practically is to find a job. The psychological/emotional experience begins with a loss, the loss of student identity and in particular the loss of protection afforded by student social work status and the camaraderie of fellow students. The bridge phase is similar to that of Bridges' model (2009), Figure 3, chapter 2, p.24 which begins with loss. The longer this phase goes on the more experience of loss there is and the greater the anxiety about what being a qualified practitioner will be like. Participant N, who waited about six months for his job, was concerned that in the waiting period he would forget what he had learned at university and therefore not be able to do the job even when he did find one. Necessity sometimes means that unqualified posts are taken and therefore a heightened awareness of not using one's training. This was the experience of W and T. However, R found that the waiting time gave a breathing space and personal battery re-charging between training and full time work as a qualified practitioner. Alongside the loss of student identity are feelings of anxiety, disappointment and hope. The full Tables of emotional responses appears as Tables 4 5, 6, Appendix III.

## 5.3 Phase 2: Beginner

The task here is to begin, to find your way in a new situation. Even if the area or the team is a familiar one, the way that you experience this is new as you are now a qualified practitioner. Being seen as a social worker has specific role expectations, alongside the responsibility and accountability that goes with this title. Here, there is both excitement and anxiety about what is going to happen in this unknown new role. Confusion and the unknown characterise this phase. Other models of transition, for example Nicholson and West (1988), chapter 2

(2.4) p.25, the encounter stage and the neutral zone in Bridges' model (2009) Figure 3, p.24, are characterised by things that are unknown and uncertain and which may be experienced as confusing and chaotic. These feelings occurred even for those who were sponsored students and were returning to a familiar local authority. The job even in the same team where you worked prior to qualification is accompanied with the awareness of how quickly change happens and all that has changed while the individual has been away. Participants experienced being bombarded with new information and ways of working, chapter 4 (4.2.1) p.114. Although they are known as newly qualified practitioners within their team, this is not how they are known to external agencies and service users. In these situations they are seen as a social worker and both external agencies and service users will have expectations of that role.

Individuals' concern and anxiety can be heightened by a lack of induction, chapter 4, (4.1.4). The beginner does not want to be seen as needy or incompetent and this lack of information seems to pervade all aspects of their experience. How do I find out how to do X? How much supervision will I receive? Am I on the newly qualified programme? What is expected of me? These questions typify the uncertainty felt by newly qualified social workers. Their emotional reactions can include feeling insecure, having great expectations of themselves and not wanting to be marked by making mistakes at the beginning of their career or being seen as dependent. One aspect of being a beginner is the need to follow rules and protocols. The lack of a planned induction tailored to the needs of the practitioner could lead to heightened concerns about doing things right as they are not sure about what the local rules, procedures and protocols are. Individuals also look for reassurance. Supervision is a space where this can occur and many beginners look forward to having this space to talk about their work, learn and be told what their role is meant to be. Supervision is a space to consider the emotional impact of the work on them as individuals. What effect has the work had on them? Transitional objects, zones of stability, chapter 2 (2.2) p.22, are crucial here as they offer a key element of support and familiarity when all else seems chaotic. In supervision the beginner is concerned to relay details of their work with service users; their focus at this level of practice is their casework with individuals. However, supervision does not always offer the haven that is sought by newly

qualified staff, chapter 4, (4.2.3), p.120. This lack of consistent supervision heightens experiences of feeling alone and abandoned with highly complex casework. This was particularly articulated by the three front-line child care workers.

#### 5.4 Phase 3: Settling in

The task in this phase is to begin to see the edges of the job of social worker. Here the social workers become more familiar with their surroundings and the workings of their particular team and become more aware of the changes in the role between student social worker and qualified social worker. This is specifically shown in the pattern of work expected. Student social workers have a limited compass of work which they carry out: for example, they do not carry sole case accountability and do not carry responsibly for statutory work. Within the first six months of work as a qualified practitioner most workers have a caseload with their name on it and they are beginning to do, for example, mental capacity assessments, case conference reports, court reports. They are the lead professional in multi-agency meeting and responsible for communicating with all stakeholders. This shift of role creates tension, anxiety and an overwhelming sense of being responsible. Individuals are concerned about the way social work is characterised in the press and there is a sense that if they do not pay attention and watch carefully what they do, they could be the next person hounded by the press, chapter 4, (4.2.4) p.124.

This period of adjustment takes many forms but there is a drive to do all that is expected in order to be seen as competent and not to let people down. This leads to reports of long working hours and the boundary between work and home being blurred. Some individuals are more conscious of the need to care for themselves while others lose the boundary between work and home life and find themselves working every night and at weekends to keep up. Those who lose the boundary between work and home appear to lose sight of themselves, as human beings with needs: for example, failing to take meal breaks or book time off to be away from work, chapter 4, (4.2.4) p.124.

It is important for social workers to begin to see that their work is worthwhile and that they do make a difference. To see some pieces of work to a conclusion helps to ground this feeling of achievement. Transitional objects, chapter 2 (2.2) p.22, associated with skills, particularly communication skills, are important here.

Towards the end of this phase individuals become aware of their own strengths and weaknesses and understand what they need to have in place to enable them to work well and what they need in place to keep themselves well. Here the use of transitional objects or familiar things is the key to well-being. By the end of this phase the social worker is not so focused on case detail and is beginning to see themselves as part of a wider picture that surrounds the service user or family.

#### 5.5 Phase 4: Feeling right in the role.

Around six months after being in post there is a sense of arrival. This is a growing self-confidence. All participants said that they were confident in their role or had increased confidence, chapter 4 (4.3.3) p.136; Appendix III, Table 6. The task in this phase is to consolidate learning and begin to develop an individual's sense of self as a qualified practitioner. That is, becoming at this time more aware of skills and gaps in knowledge and planning a way forward: Taking control of the job not allowing the job to control you. The edges of the post are clearer as are the expectations of others. Individuals are aware that their high expectations of themselves need to be amended and that they need to ensure that there is a balance between work and home life. Spilling over all the time is not healthy. If some balance is not struck the worker is unlikely to be able to sustain the burden they have taken on and are likely to break down physically or burnout emotionally/psychologically.

### **Part 2: The psychological/emotional strand**

This section focuses on the psychological and emotional strand that I suggest emerged from the findings from the results reported in the previous chapter, chapter 4, and depicted in Figure 7, p.144. There are commonalities and divergences between the participants' emotional journey but there are recurring

emotional themes. The full Tables of the emotional themes referred to in this section can be found in Appendix III

### 5.6 Aspects of psychological/emotional transition

All participants were aware of the loss of their student status. For some they would be moving to teams, locations and specialisms where they would need to form new bonds and friendships. Others stayed in the locality and team where they had been students but were still aware of their loss of student status. This awareness of loss accords with Bridges' model (2009), chapter 2, (2.3.3) p.24: Letting go of the old ways, a loss, as a first phase of a transition process. In my model this connects to the 'Phase 1: Bridge' in the developmental transition strand, Figure 7, p.144 and Table 3, p.145.

These words "anxiety", "disappointment", "excitement" and "shock" are part of the language used by participants in the first interviews (Table 4, Appendix III). Individual participants had formed a picture in the minds which anticipated how their job would be. The information used to draw these pictures came from information, positive and not so positive, gleaned during placements. A negative picture of anticipation was most keenly articulated by those going into child care posts. In this first phase of transition according to Hopson et al (1988), chapter 2 (2.5) p.27, there is a honeymoon period and a denial that the change made will make any difference to the individual concerned. This group of participants did not enter a period of denial, they were all acutely aware that a change was underway and that it had personal implications for them. This is shown in their language. I would suggest that all the media involvement in social work and social care alongside enquiries into poor practice ensure that practitioners are acutely aware of the issues of responsibility and accountability, chapter 4 (4.2.4), p.124.

The second stage, of the Nicholson and West model (1988), chapter 2 (2.4) p.26 is encounter. Here there is both optimism and shock as you are offered and accept a job: In this research that is a real and acute awareness of the accountability and responsibility that is inherent in the job of social worker. The participants were clear that the role that they had taken as a qualified social



worker bought with it both a responsibility to service users and accountability to the employers and wider community, chapter 4, (4.1.6), p.112. The sense of responsibility and accountability was experienced by participants alongside their experience of going into the unknown as they went into new situations, albeit for some in known environments. My model would place this in the second phase of the development strand, 'Beginner', chapter 5, Figure 7, p.144 and Table 3 p.145

Participants shared with me their high expectations of themselves wanting to do their best and concerned not to make mistakes. University training gave the basics of social work practice and participants were keen to practice their training as well as being concerned with how much they do not know or understand. This can be expressed as disillusionment with their training, wondering if it was all worthwhile. This felt sense of disillusionment seemed unexpected. Some participants expressed concern about whether this job of social work was for them, others worried about how much there is to learn in an ever changing environment. I would suggest that the newly qualified social workers were trying to carve out what their professional identity was to be. This sense of who am I as a social worker? This sense of identity as a social worker was tested by some of the practice that they experience and were expected to be part of. This was graphically described as fitting service users into available services rather than following a needs led approach or being asked to fudge a core assessment in order to achieve the timescales for work completion within the organisation, chapter 4, (4.2.4) p.124.

The third stage of the Nicholson and West (1988), chapter 2 (2.4) p.26, model, adjusting and changing to the requirements of the job, were experienced by these participants and this took place in the first six to nine months of employment. The final stage of this model is stabilisation where the individual begins to feel in control of the job, not controlled by it. This stage was experienced by the participants but in the context of social work in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The context is important as this model points to the final stage as stabilisation in the social work context; these participants were clear that their situation is inherently unstable and they need to be able to work within this context. The participants' experience is that no feature of social work is stable and secure so the newly qualified workers

need to have as part of their adjustment and stabilisation the ability to change and adapt to circumstances, chapter 4, (4.2.1) p.114. Individual experienced changes of office location, allocation of different supervisors, organisational change in relation to central government legislation and financial budget cuts to local government and policy changes that inform practice. Stabilisation in this context appears to be a sense of some mastery of the social work tasks which brings with it a feeling of calmness and a sense of confidence and competence. This also accords with the last phase of the Hopson et al model (1988), chapter 2 (2.5), p.27, acceptance: embracing the new allows the individual to begin to make meaning of the new situation.

In the first interviews the emotional impact of becoming a qualified worker is demonstrated in the discussion and the preoccupation of individuals with the place that they now hold in making decisions that affect the lives of other people, chapter 4, (4.1.6) p.112. Previously they felt protected by their student social worker status. This is now stripped away and they feel exposed and accountable. Thus far no other study has stated this as a major concern for both adults and children sector workers entering practice as qualified practitioners for the first time. All participants were aware of the responsibility and accountability they had in the work and that this created an emotional charge in the work that they had not experienced as student social workers. This pre-occupation with accountability and responsibility is clearly apparent in the 'Phase 2: Beginner', chapter 5 (5.3) p.147.

The implications of this research are that in the first year after graduation individual participants have their own unique individual journey in professional and psychological development but that there appears to be some common features when journeys are compared.

### 5.7 Pace and volume and the need of a safe base

By the mid-way interview the participants were now immersed in the practice of social work within their given job. There was an overwhelming concern with the pace and volume of both the work and the changes that were occurring to them.

Participants experienced a mismatch between what they were expecting and had themselves experienced as social work students on placement and the pace and volume of work that greeted them, chapter 4, (4.2.1) p.114. Jack and Donnellan (2010), chapter 2 (2.10) p.35, found in a study of child care workers that the reality of the work of the day to day and decision making, created tensions for individuals: Ideals of social work and the daily reality of their working lives were very different. Stress caused by the volume of work; the relentless nature of practice particularly in front line services in both the adult and child care sectors were shocking to these newly qualified practitioners. Healy (2009), chapter 2 2.10, p.36, argues that newly qualified child care practitioners are not prepared for the emotional intensity of the work they are asked to undertake. The three child care workers gave the most graphic descriptions of this and two of those participants seemed particularly overwhelmed. Both R and V spoke of the system causing their stress and felt that the way their teams were managed exacerbated the stress of their tasks, chapter 4, (4.2.1) p.114. An all-party parliamentary inquiry into social work (2013) took evidence of excessive bureaucracy working against and not supporting social workers. Alongside this, child care workers had high caseloads and experienced little scope for reflection or detailed case analysis.

A further aspect of this pace and volume of work was an inability commented on by three participants to switch off from the work in the evenings or at weekends; work was an ever present feature of their lives even when they were not at work, Chapter 4 (4.2.4) p.123. This inability of to “switch off” from work can be a factor that affects social workers’ well-being. This analysis suggests that there is an inherent tension in the role of social work particularly in front-line services to achieve tasks in a given time. The consequence of this tension is experienced by some of those in this sample as work spilling out into the out of work environment into non-work time. My findings accord with those of Jack and Donnellan (2010), chapter 2 (2.10) p.35, who found, that individuals reported, that their paid work crept into their non-work spaces. That is, the boundary between work and non-work became blurred.

*“I would come home, do an hour or two on the laptop, have bit to eat and fall asleep on the couch.” R.2.283*

By the end of the first six months the seven participants left in this study were clear about the importance of a home life and work boundary and the consequences to them of not having those boundaries in place. For those that had struggled to create a boundary between home and work there was the dawning realisation that they could not work at this pace. Two participants, both from child care services, were clear that the pace of work would have a negative effect on their health, chapter 4, (4.2.4) 123. One, M, changed her approach to doing what was asked of her and began to plan time away from work making regular breaks and going away on holiday. The other, R, decided that front-line assessment work was not for her and moved teams to a non-front-line post at the end of her first year of practice.

Another aspect of an emotional/psychological journey appears to be having a safe and secure base: a place to return to if the world at large feels unsafe, threatening or stressful. In the social work situation this constant place can be seen as the team/office base, a manager/supervisor or mentor. Having a safe and secure work base was not an experience that all participants had. All participants experienced change either in structure of the services, supervisors and managers or office location. Some participants experience all three of these chapter 4, (4.2.1) p.114.

This experience stems partly from these NQSWs entering the field of social work in a time of political and social upheaval, both on a national and international scale. The macro economic climate was effecting how local authority budgets had been set by central government. There were also many questions being asked across society about the practice of social work and the social care sector in general. As outlined earlier the concerns of society about the care offered through social services is often heralded following a particular incident or set of incidents. These political and economic issues meant that safe bases in the sense of a social work team, job and supervisor were likely to be in flux and sometimes experienced as in chaos.

*“you just have to get stuck in and you get bombarded with so much work that you have just got to try and do as best you can, that is all you can do really, and with*

*all the office moves as well, challenging. I, I suppose it's challenging, moving in with other people we did that once and then we moved again with other people and all the disruption that brings" P.3.19*

Alongside this the safety and security seemed to come from knowing that all newly qualified workers were feeling this sense of major change and upheaval. However, I feel that the lack of a safe secure practice environment has had its psychological effect particularly on one participant who withdrew from the sample. This person, V, was feeling unsafe and under stress and that she had lost some of the boundary between work and home life. This was clear from her inability to switch off from work, saying that she thought about work in the evenings and at the weekends. I feel that the research interviews were seen as one more thing to do in a working week that was crammed with things to do. It is also possible that seeing the researcher was a reminder of all that had happened and possibly reconnected her to the difficult realities of her role. I discuss this further in chapter 6, (6.5) from a methodological position of the effect of this on me as a researcher.

### 5.8 Transitional objects and well-being.

In the psychological literature the importance of transitional objects in times of upheaval are seen to be important. For Winnicott (1973), chapter 2 (2.3.2) p.22, a transitional object is something that you can hang on to when all around feels strange and a bit chaotic and confusing. Pedler et al (2007) chapter 2 (2.3.2) p.22, uses the term "zone of stability" (p. 188) and writes of the zone offering an area of stability when all around is in flux. These zones include ideas and philosophy, a literal place, a familiar object or organisational membership. This research has found that in this year's journey in qualified practice each individual spoke about and held on to the skills that they had been taught, well-being routines, family and friendship groups and spoke of them as important to their personal stability. These I would suggest act as transitional objects.

Personal fitness routines came across as important for establishing a way of de-stressing as part of self-care and maintaining a work life balance. The participants who had regular routines of self-care spoke less of stress and being overwhelmed

than those who had let go of the importance of self-care. Loss of self-care affected not just the individual but contributed to a loss of work life balance which affects a wider group of intimate relationships. Participants reported that their partners found it difficult to cope with their working long hours and their emotional absence from family life because they were drained and exhausted by their work: Individuals having little time or emotional energy for activities beyond the work place, chapter 4 (4.2.1) p.114. Life reduced to going home eating, working on reports and sleeping. Reference was made by all eight individuals to the importance of their family and close friends as a familiar and constant presence during this transition. These connections provided opportunities to talk about their stressful work. Being with familiar people, friends and family, provided a place for feelings that are not dealt with at work to be shared. This was particularly important for participants who felt unseen and unheard by supervisors.

All participants were clear that their ability to communicate at a variety of levels, to a large number of people, was a key skill that they drew on all the time. They found it comforting that they had this core skill which they deployed all the time and that reconnected them with university training and placement experience. This study suggests that communication skill acts as a transitional object.

### 5.9 Non-linear paths.

Individuals particularly those in frontline teams experience their transition in the first phase as shocking. For most this is because of the pace of change and the level of responsibility and accountability that they carry.

*“I am acutely aware that I am more accountable than when I was unqualified, because before I could say I am not qualified, I can only do what I can do, and it is not my fault. You can’t rely on that.” P.2.107*

Part of their adjustment to their situation involves denial that it is not too bad but also a sense of aloneness in this new and strange world. Expectations of support are not fulfilled which can lead to anger. Over time there is a growing self-

awareness and self-reliance. This takes place I would suggest in Phase 3 of the developmental strand in my model, Figure 7, p.144, Table 3, p.145.

This research suggests that individuals seldom have a straightforward path from the end of training to the end of their first qualified year in practice. There are marked points at which there can be despair as well as good feelings of achievement and progress. The journey shows both forward progress and regressive elements. Moving to the new is exciting but there is awareness of the difficulties in the role, whether this has been gleaned from experience or from hearsay or the news coverage of social work. First steps on the journey can be a gentle introduction or a rabbit in the headlights moment. Whichever path is followed it will have an impact on the next phase of the psychological journey. If the person does not have enough transitional objects or respite in a safe base the path they tread can become increasingly a rocky road. At the end of the first year the seven remaining participants felt that they had been on a significant journey which they had survived; and that they had grown in confidence and competence and now felt like qualified workers, chapter 4, (4.3.3) p.135. These workers felt that they understood the parameters of the job, had mastered the systems that they were working within and set some work life boundaries for themselves. These seven participants agreed that they had felt like qualified practitioners before the end of their first year, most around the end of the first six months.

#### 5.10 Emotional words used to describe the different stages of the psychological/emotion strand.

Figure 8 below is based on consolidation of the emotional reactions and the words used by participants to describe their individual journeys of transition. The boxes represent emotions at each stage in the process. This emotional sequence is a synthesis of common experience expressed by participants. It does not mean that all participants went through this linear process. Not every participant felt every emotion but this model uses participants' words and I have interpreted these into sequenced journey.

Emotional words used to describe the different stages of the psychological/emotion strand mapped with the phased development strand

Figure 8

<p>Pre-job and post University</p> <p><i>[Phase 1: Bridge]</i></p>	<p>Anticipation Anxiety Excitement</p>
<p>New starter</p> <p><i>[Phase 2: Beginner]</i></p>	<p>Confused/ Chaotic feelings Loss of identity Expectations of others Feeling unskilled Fear of the unknown Need for reassurance</p>
<p>First few weeks</p> <p><i>[Phase 2: Beginner]</i></p>	<p>Shock Reality of the work Responsibility and accountability</p>
<p>Three month point</p> <p><i>[Phase 3: Settling in]</i></p>	<p>Disappointment Stress Overload and Pace of change</p>
<p>Six month point</p> <p><i>[Phase 4: Feeling like a social worker]</i></p>	<p>Seeing routes through Stock taking Some sense of satisfaction Some personal resilience/confidence</p>
<p>End of First year</p> <p><i>[Phase 4: Feeling like a social worker]</i></p>	<p>Growing confidence/ resilience More awareness of needs Some personal satisfaction</p>



### **Part 3: The professional strand**

The professional journey of the participants appears to have several separate parts and as I suggest is a non-linear path.. There is a pre-training stage followed by learning the skills and knowledge of the social work profession in the context of a social work training and lastly by practicing as a qualified practitioner. In the first year of practice following qualification social workers begin to develop their personal stance to their job and an understanding of their way of being a practitioner including the supports they need in place to increase their competence and confidence as a social worker.

#### **5.1.1 The influence of professional training**

The transition process of becoming a qualified social worker starts in training long before a person is offered a qualified social work post. The majority of social work students have some prior experience of social work. This might have been as an unqualified worker, a service user or as a volunteer. In any of these capacities individuals have some exposure to the profession and gain some background knowledge but this experience is not the experience of being a qualified social worker. This experience however does play a part in their selection procedure to embark on a training programme.

University training is the first crucial step on a professional social work career path. This analysis would suggest that social workers under the current system of training receive a rounded generic social work education based on social work principles of best practice. In chapter 4, (4.3.3) p.135 participants revealed that their training had given them a basic foundation in social work; this finding accords with Marsh and Triseliotis (1999), Pithouse and Scourfield (2002), Lyons and Manion (2004) and Bates et al (2010). Blewitt and Tunstall (2008) questioned whether generic social work training has specific relevance to the delivery of child care services. Having undertaken research into this matter the authors found that generic training did deliver well-qualified child care workers. The experience of these participants and my interpretation of their experience would accord with Blewitt and Tunstall's findings. I would suggest that the data gives a picture of

university training that enables individuals to enter the profession from a solid platform of knowledge, albeit a generic platform of knowledge

Although participants were content that they had a solid understanding of generic social work, they did comment that they lacked specialist knowledge that they felt they needed for their current job. This confirmed the sense I had from reading the literature. Individuals felt that they lacked knowledge that could be used in their specific specialist work sphere; this reflected the different kinds of knowledge and skill needed within each specialist arena. Child care workers said that they needed specific knowledge about child development, attachment theory and court work, while the adult service sector workers said that they needed more knowledge and skill in the area of mental health specifically about mental health conditions and treatment options. Moriarty and Manthorpe (2013) in their scoping review 2011 for the SWRB found the greatest consensus from recent research 2009-2011 concerned the lack of basic skills and knowledge in regard to court skills; dealing with aggression and hostility; communicating with children and young people; mental health; and time management. My research analysis agrees with Moriarty and Manthorpe (2013) and previous research studies Marsh and Triseliotis (1999), Lyons (1999) and Lyons and Manion (2004).

It is noticeable from my data and the work cited above that the skills individuals feel that they lack are skills which I would argue cannot be expected to be developed in training. During training student social workers do not have sole case responsibility and the limited nature of placements means that students seldom see the whole process of a case from referral to completion. For example in a placement in child care there is little opportunity to develop report writing and court skills. In adult care student social workers would not fully prepare a Mental Capacity Assessment (2005) or deal with the conflict that can arise in such a process. Realistically a change in the social work training curriculum cannot address these skills gaps and perhaps the employers need to understand that these skills can be developed during the first year of practice if resources and time are allocated to do so. I would go further to argue that NQSWs need reassurance that these skills can and will be developed through their first year of practice.

Generic training offers a basic introduction to the profession but training needs to be continued to ensure that social workers have the specific specialist training they need to carry out the specialist social work tasks that are associated with specific social work roles in a fast changing and challenging social care environment. I would argue that this has implications for the programme offered by employers to newly qualified social workers in their assessed first year in practice. Employers need to have a clear view and plan to ensure that the specialist skills needed for specialist posts are available in an organised and planned way for NQSWs.

A key aspect of their training that was commented on by all participants was the difference between what they were taught about practice in the university, which was principle and value based, and the realities of social work practice, chapter 4, (4.3.3) p.135. I would suggest that academic staff need to be, and their training materials need to be, up to date and to incorporate the fast changing policy and organisational context of social work. Once in practice, the realities and pressures of the work environment and the complexity of some of the case situations that the newly qualified workers were confronting did not lend themselves to mobilising idealised principles. The real world of social work practice appears quite murky; that is, decision making is not as black and white as portrayed within the classroom setting. This suggests a difference between knowledge in an academic sense learned in the classroom and working with that knowledge in the practice arena: the gap between theoretical knowledge and practice knowledge. Clapton et al (2006) sum this up as the “two separate worlds of theory and practice” (p.648). I would suggest that academic staff and their training materials need to be up to date to incorporate the fast changing policy and organisational context of social work. It is difficult to see how up-dating can be achieved unless university staff have regular involvement in social work services. This could take the form of secondments both ways from the field into universities or from universities to the field. My experience is that this seldom happens and that many academics, though by no means all, have not been in practice for a long-time.

## 5.12 Placements

In social work practice there are no generic social work teams in public sector or private and voluntary organisations. Therefore all student placements are specialised, with students joining a team in either adults-focused services or children and families-focused services. It is clear from the individuals' experience expressed in the data, chapter 4, (4.1.3), p.104, that placements are a key aspect of the professional qualifying experience. Placements offer students the opportunity to put theory into practice with real clients, they help students understand about social work values and principles in action and demonstrate the range of opportunities that are available in social work for qualified practitioners. In placements social work students begin to develop professional knowledge which includes the realisation of the complex range of skills and knowledge there is in the social work profession.

Participants in this research, chapter 4, (4.1.3), p.104, report a variable picture of what placements were like and that some placements offer a highly structured learning experience whereas others are less clear in structure and quality. This lack of consistency leads to more or less learning opportunities for the students. Some participants had placements where there were no social workers present in the workplace. Practice educators, the people who help the student synthesise theory into practice as they work with members of the public, are not always on site. In this sample some student social work supervisors, that is the person who has case responsibility for the student's casework in placement, were not social workers. Having no social workers on site and a supervisor who was not a social worker led to a less satisfactory placement outcome.

The students particularly those in a first professional placement, are disadvantaged if there are no social workers on site as the student has no role model/s to observe. This means that the student has to find their own way in assessing the parameters of the social work task and what they should be doing in that particular location/specialism. Lack of role models can inhibit the professional development. Key learning opportunities for social work students come from engaging in discussions with other social work practitioners, possibly

shadowing their work, attending professional meetings and working alongside qualified social workers. I would suggest that it is in placement where the process of the integration of theory and practice occurs and that academic learning starts to make practical sense. This analysis accords with previous research findings: Doel et al (2007) who argue that there was not a typical pattern of how placements are organised and Blewett and Tunstall (2008) who raised concerns about the quality and quantity of placements available.

Clapton et al (2008) argue for a bridging of the gap between universities and the practice area and go further to suggest the re-conception of the role and activities of the students tutor vis-a-vis the placement. This change in tutor role, having a tutor who is more present in the placement workplace, would help to narrow the gap between theory and practice. I would concur with Clapton et al (2006, 2008) that there needs to be a narrower gap between academic input and practice placements. Greater tutor input would bridge the gap, offering quality assurance to both the student and the university that the placements made are fit for purpose. I would suggest that there is the need to consider each placement from a holistic point of view. Does this placement offer a number of learning opportunities for the student? Are there sufficient social workers present in the placement to give the student social worker an opportunity to develop their understanding of the profession? What emerges from the data is the suggestion that the decision about the quality of placements needs to be a professional social work decision. Tutors need to understand the placements in a holistic professional sense. I would argue that this is not an administrative task but a professional task. Tutors need to ensure placements are meeting students' learning needs and that the placements delivers what they have contracted to provide. I would suggest more professional involvement in approving, making and quality assuring placements as they are such a key aspect of professional development.

It is not only the quality of the placement that varies but the gaining of a placement also appears arbitrary. Responses of participants, chapter 4, (4.1.3) p.104, in this research suggest that they felt social worker training placements appeared to arbitrarily given out. Students are asked to complete information of their experience, locality of choice and placement preferences. However, there is

currently an imbalance in the placements available to the students; there are more students than placements available. That is, stakeholders do not have an infinite number of placements so the placement team who are administrators match the individuals to placements as best that they can.

The sponsored participants, chapter 4, (4.1.3), p.104, felt that those making the placements appeared to have no real understanding of some of the pre- training roles that individuals have held but these roles do influence the type of placement that a student receives. That is, if you have been an unqualified worker in a statutory team this is seen as statutory experience. This decision takes no account of the different levels of responsibility between qualified and unqualified workers.

*“I have never worked in an area I did 2 days shadowing before doing the course, I have worked with social workers but never in an area team, so that is a bit of apprehension” V.1.49*

This data would suggest that all students need statutory experience. Bates et al (2010) found that graduates acknowledged the importance of placements within their training, particularly placements in the statutory sector. Experience of the world of frontline services gives individuals some preparation and insight that cannot be gained from reading. This statutory experience allows individuals to test themselves in a contained environment where there are protections and safeguards for students, more than can be offered to qualified workers who by their title are seen as being responsible and accountable for their actions. This protected student experience may alleviate the stress of going into the unknown, which was the experience of two participants who went into frontline child care teams without the benefit of any work experience in such teams, chapter 4 (4.113) p.104. I was surprised that it is possible to qualify as a social worker without having worked alongside a qualified social work practitioner in a statutory setting.

Frontline services account for the majority of vacancies in local authorities. Statutory experience may aid the transition experience of newly qualified workers and possibly provide more confident and competent individuals from training who

are ready to join frontline services. Neither the participants nor I would suggest that sponsored students should only have statutory placements in one sector during training, but unqualified social work experience is not the same as statutory experience and working alongside qualified practitioners and experiencing statutory work is an important part of a student social worker's professional development.

Self-funding students have much to learn about social care. However, the choice of placement is crucial to their future, for if you have little previous experience in social care then your placement experience will be a significant part of your social work CV when applying for a job. Self-funding students did not seem to understand the importance of their placement choices. The importance of their placement experience only became apparent when the newly qualified practitioners began to look for their first job.

This analysis suggests that students need to be made aware when they apply for placements that their choices at this stage may affect the type of work that will be available to them on graduation. For example, if a student social worker thinks that they would like to work in a mental health team then they would be advised to ensure that one of their placements is in the statutory part of this sector. This would ensure that they had experience of their chosen work area to offer employers on graduation. To reiterate, this experience is crucial for self-funding students as they rely on placement experience to demonstrate to employers that they understand the pressures and the complexity that they are likely to confront in statutory services and specialist services.

The importance of statutory experience cannot be underestimated for either sponsored or self-funding students. The experience of the four self-funding students particularly demonstrates this point, chapter 4, (4.1.3) p.104. Keen and Parker (2009) found that placement experience influences career focus. Bates et al (2010) found that a placement in the statutory sector was important for experiencing the processes involved in statutory work. Blewett and Tunstall (2008) found that students value practice placements highly.

My analysis suggests that the employers and the training institutions need to consider how placements are allocated. Clearly employers can only cope with a finite amount of social work students but if social workers are to begin their working lives from a generic training then placements are the key indicator of practice readiness. If an employer sees that an individual has had experience of a statutory team, particularly in a front-line service, then they know that that person will have some idea of the expectations that will be placed on them and some understanding about the type of work that they will be offered. Without this experience students, particularly self-funding students, could be disadvantaged as they enter the search for work; chapter 4, (4.1.3) illustrates this point.

#### 5.13 The process of getting a qualified practitioner's post for this cohort.

All practitioners, chapter 4 (4.1.2) p.100, had a difficult experience in gaining a social work post, although the issues were different for sponsored and non-sponsored graduates. The sponsored graduates had a contractual agreement to work for their employer for a period of two years post-qualification. These workers contracts are with the County Council, District council or city borough but in practice it is the service area, child care or adult services that sponsored them, that they will return to. The general feeling among sponsored graduates is that their preference for work or location is not taken into account and they are placed where the vacancies are. The job placement appears to take no account of the experience that they have had as social work students.

The self-funders realised as soon as they looked at websites advertising vacancies that there was little work for newly qualified social workers. The lack of jobs comes for the most part from the financial cuts in local government funding. The lack of jobs available was a huge shock to the participants, for when they began training jobs were being offered with bonus payments attached to attract social workers to specific localities and jobs. This finding raises concern about the lack of workforce planning in the social care sector. The SWRB (2010) had a recommendation that there was the need for a workforce forecasting model for social worker supply and demand. This lack of forecasting information can have a detrimental effect on those training as social workers as there may be too many



newly trained social workers and no jobs available. I had not considered at the beginning of this research that there would be no workforce planning model nationally for social work. I know that there are regional and locality variations of need; however, training is partly funded through a bursary system and it is startling that no-one appears to know if any of the training places versus job vacancies add up now or for the future.

The macro economic climate has influenced local authority and charity sector spending and there are less jobs available to recent graduates. Moria Gibb, Chair of the SWRB in 2012, in her progress report on the board's recommendations, referred to the significant reduction in resources impacting on services. What emerges from this data is the importance of the universities and the employers working closely together to ensure that those in teaching roles understand the work situation in the vicinity of the university and nationally. Students have a responsibility to be aware of the job market, but as this is a vocational training most students look into the possibilities for work before applying for their degree. The effect of the local authority expenditure cuts does not seem to have been made clear to the social work students in terms of impact on them. This would suggest tighter guidance to the students about the effects of placements on future careers and university staff having strong links to practice to ensure that context changes are integrated into teaching.

I have found no other study that has outlined the specific experience of self-funding and sponsored students and the differences of how these two groups experience the process of leaving university and gaining a job as a qualified practitioner. The studies cited above, Doel (2007), Blewitt and Tunstall (2008) Bates et al (2010) looked at the experience of the individuals post-graduation as they begin their careers and concentrated on issues of practice readiness. However, they did not say whether the individuals in the sample were sponsored or self-funding. Hussein et al (2011) undertook a quantitative analysis that focused on the characteristics of sponsored students and other social work students. Hussein et al (2011) found as I have done that sponsored students have more experience of social work. However, they also found that sponsored students were older. The age range in this study was broadly similar in both groups

sponsored and self-funding. At the start of the research the sponsored group had two women mid and late forties, one man and one woman late 20s. The self-funding group had one woman late 40s, one man early 30s, two women mid 20s.

I have asked individuals to describe their experience of gaining a job and have found that sponsored individuals are guaranteed a job but little credence is given to their training. It seems to me that this is an unusual way to use an investment. Clearly those who are sponsored are thought to be people who have the potential to qualify as social workers and their employers invest money and time in them. However, on return to the employer little credence is taken of the training that they have received. In case study P, Appendix IV, it is clear to P that as he was sponsored by adult services he would return to adult services. This was despite the fact that he had had a very successful final placement in a child assessment team within the county council that had sponsored him. He enjoyed the work, the team where he had been a student told him they would want to offer him a job and they had vacancies. P knew this would not be possible as he had been sponsored by adult services and because of this he would return to a post in adult services. This does seem a waste of this specialist placement experience and individual potential. Prior to undertaking this research I had not considered the difference between self-funding and sponsored social work students in any aspect of their training.

Gaining a post is only a part of the transition story, the next stage concerns understanding the role and expectations employers have of a new member of staff through the information provide to them.

#### 5.14 What is expected of me as an NQSW?

My model would suggest that this would be at the beginning of the phase 2 of the developmental strand, 'Beginner', Figure 7, p.144 and Table 3, 145. The giving of information is an important part of the transition journey. Newly qualified practitioners are dependent on being given information about the team they will be working in and how that team functions. This type of information sharing enables individuals to get a sense of their role and function within the team to which they

are attached within the first few weeks and months of being a qualified social worker. Participants described their acute awareness of the expectations that individuals, professionals and service users had when they saw the label social worker, chapter 4, (4.1.6) p.112. Service users and other professionals expect the newly qualified worker to know about their role and their place in the system. This was not always the case and there can be clashes of expectations. In the first weeks much of what the role is, is gleaned from previous experience, from information received about the role and from watching others perform the role. Handy (1993), chapter 2 (2.4) p.25, states roles are about categories for data that people have about other people. These categories allow assumptions to be made. Unclear expectations can create ambiguity making it impossible for the role holder to adjust to all the demands made upon them.

Participants got little or variable amounts of information from employers about their job and the team that they had joined, chapter 4 (4.1.4) p.107. The lack of information is in some way explained by the ever changing context of social work written about by authors including Jones (2001), Jordan and Jordan (2006) and Social Work Reform Board (2010). These authors point to the constant changes not just in relation to the role of function of social work but also the context of social work. Social services departments come across as ever-shifting and changing both in local authorities and in the private and voluntary sector. The economic climate and the political context all influence social work services. Alongside this is the complex nature of working with human situations that are ever changing and not easy to standardise or quantify. Youll (1985) chapter 2 (2.7) p. 56, Laming (2003, 2009) chapter 2 (2.15) p.53 and Munro (2011), chapter 2 (2.12) p.43, all write about the complexity of social work and the need to work with this complexity.

A basic building block for social service delivery is a team and has been throughout the many shifts and changes in social work. Teams have names and a designated field of activity, for example the assessment team for older people for town X, or the county wide team for out of county placement reviews for adults with disability. In this research the team was seen as a group to which the participants were attached. Here they would receive supervision and cases would

be allocated to them. Some participants spoke of finding informal support in this group but surprisingly there was little revealed about how teams functioned and their importance to the NQSWs. The sense that comes from the data is that the team is more of an administrative boundary than a supportive, cohesive unit of work activity. Workers come across as lone workers with no space for co-working, therefore little opportunity to see how others use their skills and knowledge. Munro (2011) suggests the re-organising of child care services with more emphasis on a small team structure but this is missing from the SWRB recommendations.

Despite the wide ranging changes in the national economy and political structures that affect social work, there are aspects of information giving to new members of staff at a local team level that would assist a smoother transition for newly qualified workers. Induction and ASYE/NQSW programmes are two aspects of information sharing that arose as significant from the findings of my research.

#### 5.15 Induction

Induction in this context is the introduction of the new worker to the workplace and is an important part of the development strand, Phase 2, 'Beginner'. This induction has at least two levels in the case of larger organisations: for example, in a County Council a general introduction to the organisation and on a local level an introduction to the team. The team induction would include the locality context and important information about the basic team functions like team meetings, how work is allocated, and the expectations of individuals as team members and the policies and procedures that define the parameters of safe practice for the social workers in the team.

Six participants, working in two different social work organisations across both adult and child care services, spoke about the fact that they did not have a planned induction period, chapter 4, (4.1.4) p.107. Two participants, working in different service sectors, adult services and child care, one in a county council one in a private and voluntary setting, had an induction that was planned and organised in a structured way. This finding should be viewed in the context of a

package of measures agreed by the Social Work Reform Board with employers in 2010, chapter 2 (2.12), p.41. The SWRB package included a set of standards concerning induction and clearly states that there needs to be an effective induction programme tailored to social worker's needs in their first year in practice. Part of an induction process would also be an introduction to supervision policies within the organisation and the expectations that employers have of newly qualified workers. As already stated there appears to have been a paucity of clear information given by employers to newly qualified workers about expectations and what supports would be available to them.

Bradley (2008), chapter 2 (2.10) p.36, argues that induction practices may help to explain what is expected and required of individuals in their new role. Here induction is allied to a rite of passage or initiation into the role of social worker. Bates et al (2010) state that induction is usually the first formal work based training that a newly qualified social worker receives and found that application varies between employers. Laming (2003, 2009) specifically emphasised the importance and necessity of staff working with children to have a complete induction which includes local policies and procedures. According to research studies, Bates et al (2010), and Bradley (2008) induction has a role and socialising function. Laming (2003, 2009) is concerned with induction from a policy and procedure standpoint with public safety as the key motivating factor. Kearns and McArdle (2011) that an induction process is significant in assisting the transition of new practitioners. I would argue understanding the role of the newly qualified practitioner in a particular team, socialising and being informed of policies and procedures are all equally important components of induction, which need to be moulded into a planned and organised programme to enable a smooth and less stressful transition for practitioners in to their new job.

In some instances induction was not forthcoming, as the employers appeared to rely on student placement induction if individuals had been employed as qualified practitioners in the same team or part of the organisation where they had been students. I was surprised that employers can see no difference in the roles, duties, accountability and greater responsibilities that are placed on a qualified social work practitioner as opposed to a student social work practitioner. Bates et

al (2010), chapter 2 (2.10) p.37, found that employers were using the previous knowledge of newly qualified staff; if they had been sponsored or had been students in the local authority they were not offered a full induction package. Bates et al (2010) further found that managers did not feel equipped to undertake the formal induction of new staff. Participant P returning to a location well known to him experienced huge changes in systems and processes which were not discussed by his manager. He was expected to familiarise himself with things that had changed while he had been in training. It is possibly that because the pace of change is so fast it is hard for the managers to remember all the changes there may have been. For participant S no induction happened as this participant had a manager new to the local authority so did not know the organisation well enough to offer an induction. A lack of a focused and planned induction led several participants to spend time researching protocols, procedures and the paperwork they needed to complete pieces of casework.

My reading of the literature led me to think that induction would not be an area of concern raised by those in transition, but it does seem to be an area which needs to be attended to by employers. I suggest to ensure that workers have the tools for their jobs a planned induction tailored to the needs of each individual is vital and in the longer term a cost effective endeavour rather than a waste of resource. In the course of trying to find their way around complex administrative systems, individuals not only spent their own time researching the information they needed, they also asked other team members for help. Although this is part of team building for a newcomer, that is getting to know colleagues and their specialisms, it is also time consuming for both parties. Generally experienced social workers are not given time to act as mentors or buddies in this way.

I argue that a general induction to team protocols and ways of working would save time and improve efficiency. A development of induction would be to have a mentoring system for each newly qualified worker for the first three months of their employment. The function of the mentor would be to answer queries about practical matters like where to find forms, who is the person to talk to about a particular issue. The mentors would need this function to be recognised in the local workload allocation scheme.

My research data suggests, despite all that has been written and researched in relation to induction by authors such as Laming (2003), Brown et al (2007), Bradley (2008) and Bates et al (2010) and signed up to by employers, that is common induction standards from Skills for Care (2006), Social Work Reform Board recommendations (2010), workers are still starting their practice with insufficient information about local policies and procedures to ensure that they work safely, efficiently and in line with local policies and procedures. I am not clear where the difficulty lies in this instance but it is of concern that employers and supervisors do not give priority to the induction of new staff. I wonder where employers, managers and supervisors expect that a new worker will find out information that they need to know.

On a psychological note a basic induction to staff would help them feel welcomed into their new post and to some extent looked after, valued and protected in that someone had taken time to consider what their needs might be and helped them individually to begin find their way into their new job and team. This would accord with Bowlby's notion (1969), chapter 2 (2.3.1) p.20, that individuals need a safe base from which to explore new territory. This concept can be combined with the work of Winnicott (1973, chapter 2 (2.3.1) p.20,) concerning an individual's need to have a facilitating environment in order to grow and develop. Youll and McCourt-Perring (1993) express this as an facilitating environment which supports and nurtures individuals. Youll (1985) described individuals deploying their talents best when they have trusted persons offering support should the need arise. In this analysis sample only one participant spoke of their team manager creating a safe base from which he could to explore the terrain as a qualified social worker.

#### 5.16 Newly Qualified Social Worker programme or Assessed and Supported First Year programme, help or hindrance?

This research took place while there were changes in the way newly qualified social workers were looked after by their first employer. The newly qualified social worker programme (NQSW) was a precursor of the assessed first year in social work programme (ASYE) which came into being in September 2012 (Social Work

Reform Board 2010), chapter 2 (2.12) p.43. Both systems are to enable those who have just qualified a time for consolidation and undertake further training within the workplace post-qualification. Both schemes, NQSW and ASYE, are made up of several components: in-house training consolidating and developing practice skills, a protected caseload and regular supervision. Some schemes also have an academic component delivered in a higher education setting. The main change between the two schemes is that the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) developed by the SWRB (2010) is now held by the College of Social Work. The PCF sets out the range of capabilities that a social worker needs to have at all stages of their career. The expectation is that over time capabilities will strengthen as the worker becomes more experienced. It is important to note this is a capability and not competence based framework. A competence framework considers the work and level that a social worker is able to carry out; the first level of competence is readiness to practice.

The amount of training and support that NQSWs received in this sample was not standardised, chapter 4, (4.22), p.116. There were variations between adult services and child care services. There appeared to be no clear rationale for this. For adult service workers who had different employers there were workshops every three months, a protected caseload and a portfolio of work to be completed. The consultant practitioner who ran the three monthly sessions also provided expert advice/mentoring as required. For child care workers, working for one of the same employers as above, there was a protected caseload, and monthly sessions with a co-ordinator/mentor who invited guest speakers and offered opportunities to discuss training material and issues of practice. All the child care participants worked for the same employer. The two participants both from adult services, both with different employers, subject to ASYE schemes had huge differences in the training and supports received. One had a protected caseload, portfolio task with a weekly ASYE activity, either supervision or training; the other receiving the adult services model as described above, a protected caseload, supervision, portfolio task and a three monthly ASYE training programme. The portfolio task for the second participant was also the same as the NQSW competence based portfolio, albeit that the ASYE scheme falls under the PCF a capabilities framework.



I would argue that if the PCF is a national framework there needs to be some consistency of input to the newly qualified practitioners. This does not accord with the SWRB who state that it is important for there to be sector-wide consistency. If a differential continues between sectors, I would suggest this feeds the view of adult services workers that they are not as valued as their child care colleagues; in this sample adult sector workers had a lower salary than child care colleagues and less training input.

In this research two participants who are frontline child care staff commented that they had no time to do the newly qualified programme, for each NQSW group they felt unprepared, the program was a pressure not something that they gained from. A third child care participant felt that her learning suffered as others were not prepared so discussion groups could not be held.

Alongside the formal newly qualified programme the participants were all eligible for a range of training offered by their employers and there seemed no limit on how much they could do. Managers or supervisors according to participants were for the most part unaware of what training their staff were undertaking. I wonder what the point is of social workers undertaking training which their manager or supervisor is unaware of, and where this fits with enabling workers to consolidate their skills and understanding over their first year of practice while receiving regular supervision and a protected caseload. This point will be further discussed under the sub-heading 5.17 supervision, p.176, below.

This research found that NQSW scheme and ASYE programme were seen by participants as a good thing which offered both support and connection with others in a similar position, Chapter 4, (4.3.1) p 133. However, the assessed portfolio requirement was seen as repetitive, time consuming and not facilitating learning, a task to be got through rather than a learning opportunity.

*“yeah, it was a real tick box exercise, we were meant to have protected time to do it but that went out the window so I did it at weekends as I just wanted to get it done” P.3.105*

Three participants questioned the learning that they had gained by doing this task as the task appears to be based on checking competence not consolidating learning. As already noted the portfolio task did not seem to have changed in one authority with the advent of ASYE. A competence based portfolio remained.

The newly qualified social workers had no clear information about the protection that would be afforded in their first year. Random information appears to be given about the expectation that the organisation has of a newly qualified social worker in particular how much work they are expected to do. Protected caseload figures seem to the participants as being an arbitrary number plucked from the air which becomes a protected caseload and this number is said to be a ten per cent reduction of caseload that an experienced worker would hold. None of the participants understood how the number was calculated. However, all caseloads are expected to take account of the complexity of work but as workers do not openly see the workload of their colleagues this is not transparent to them. Therefore a newly qualified worker is dependent on their manager's view of what their workload should be like. These research analyses suggest there is a wide variation in management views on the level of an NQSW caseload even within the same service sector.

There does appear to be a paradox in the ASYE training and its affection for an assessed portfolio of work to demonstrate competence. First the professional capabilities framework is based on the notions of capabilities and growing capabilities over time. The newly qualified social worker has demonstrated their competence by graduating as a social worker; however, many of the portfolio tasks they undertake look at whether they can carry out tasks. Secondly, a major part of the professional capabilities framework is based on the social worker reflecting on their practice and developing their skills and expertise in line with their job. This would suggest that individuals should be engaged and encouraged to have a tailored plan for their ASYE year, not to be fitted into a one size fits all scheme.

The NQSW/ASYE scheme begins for many straight after the university year ends as individuals are employed as qualified workers. There appears to be no time for

the ASYE to settle into their new role before they are asked to do further training and justify their learning. Again a paradox as the individual is also told that their first year is concerned with the consolidation of learning. It is difficult to understand how the NQSW can reflect on their learning when there is a pressure to complete a portfolio of work and attend various meetings and trainings while they are trying to understand their new role and the expectations that the organisation that employs them has for them.

A significant aspect of the NQSW and ASYE schemes is the regular supervision.

### 5.17 Supervision

The common framework for supervision agreed with employers under Skills for Care (2002) consolidated by the Social Work Reform Board (2010) is that a newly qualified worker can expect a weekly supervision for six weeks, then fortnightly sessions until the end of their first six months increasing to monthly thereafter. The SWRB (2010) sets out that reflective supervision should be offered to support the NQSW. Supervision in social work as discussed by Kadushin (1976), chapter 2 (2.14) p.46, covers three core areas: management/administration to ensure standards of practice are maintained; educative, that is developing the practitioner; and supportive enabling space for reflection. Supervision is a place where the NQSW can find support and be enabled to critically reflect on their work, ask for guidance, and discuss ways of working informed by theory and research. There should also be space to explore issues and conflicts that might be raised for the NQSW by the complex tasks they are asked to engage with. There are various forms of supervision: individual, group and peer. Individual is the most common form of supervision offered as it has the potential to cover all three aspects of supervision. Group supervision for this sample of participants was part of the NQSW/ASYE experience that is meeting with a consultant practitioner for casework discussions of cases that the participants held. This is outside a line management structure. Peer group supervision experiences were seen by these participants as informal case discussions.

In chapter 4, (4.2.3) p.119, I reported that all participants received supervision, although the regularity of supervision did waiver from the details of the supervision policy that they had been given as part of their NQSW/ASYE scheme. Only one participant spoke of having frequent supervision that fitted with the expectation she had from the details of the scheme that she had been given in her locality. Participants spoke, chapter 4, (4.2.1) p.114 that from their perspective and experience supervision was seen as a task-driven activity and that managers appeared interested only in completing their required supervision tasks: that is, to check the social worker's decision making and ensure work was completed in line with the departmental deadlines. Target fulfilment superseded everything else. There was no sense of supervision being a place to work with their development as a practitioner or to reflect formally on practice. Throughout this first year in practice participants were encouraged to undertake specialist training facilitated by the employers on a large array of topics: for example, autism, attachment theory, court work skills. However, there is little or no use made of this training in supervision. In fact most participants report that their manager/supervisor did not know the training that they are doing within or without the NQSW programme.

This lack of engagement with staff offers a paradox. The organisation appears to suggest that individuals are valued members of staff who are offered training courses to develop skills and knowledge. On the other side the majority of supervisors do not appear to want to know or have any interest in an individual's development as a social worker, being only concerned with the meeting of targets and deadlines. Skinner (2013) finds that "managers seem less able to execute responsibility for the development of their staff" (p.190). Learning and development of staff appears to be located elsewhere in organisations, not in the supervision relationship.

Supervisors are not introduced by name or in person until the worker is in post. The contract of supervision is developed over time. One participant had his performance targets set for the coming year six weeks before he had met his casework supervisor. Some individuals are told that they will have regular supervision at a set time but this is rare and priority given to this supervisory relationship is missing. The majority of participants speak of missed and erratic

supervision sessions that get delayed and re-arranged with more regularity than the sessions are actually held. Sessions are often interrupted and sometime not held in quiet spaces.

Previous research, chapter 2 (2.10) p.35, by Bradley (2008) and Marsh and Triseliotis (1996) found supervision to be unstructured, frequently postponed or cancelled. Supervision was not experienced as a management priority and everyone seemed too busy to ring-fence space. Jack and Donnellan (2010) found that newly qualified workers felt dissatisfied and unsupported by their supervision. They did not feel that they have sufficient space to reflect on their practice experience. This research accords with the research of Marsh and Triseliotis (1996), Bradley (2008) and Jack and Donnellan (2010). Supervision practice does not seem to have changed over the last decade or more. I was dismayed that an aspect of practice which has been seen as important to the health of the profession, ensuring public safety through making sure social workers are working in line with policies and protocols and helping them reflect on their practice, is consistently reported by researchers as being a neglected area in the practice arena. This research accords with the lack of priority given to supervision.

Supervision is said to be a priority by employers who have agreed with the latest recommendations of the Social Work Reform Board (2010) and Munro (2011). In this sample the participants suggest the reality of the workplace, high demand and volume of work means that supervision is often the first part of professional practice to be sacrificed. This flies in the face of many examples from social work enquiries, for example Laming (2003, 2009), where managers and supervisors are not in step with a piece of practice and a child comes to significant harm, for example Peter Connolly.

On an individual social worker basis it is not just that the decision-making is not shared and checked but that the worker does not have an opportunity to discuss their worries and concerns. This research suggests that few workers have a reliable system of supervision that includes their development as professional social workers. Considering the work of Kadushin (1976), Pettes (1979) and Ruch (2002), chapter 2 (2.14) p.46, and this analysis of participants' experience,

chapter 4 (4.2.3) p.120, I suggest that supervision is very different in practice than is argued as good practice by these three academics. The participants in this sample describe supervision as being organised around the managerial and accountability functions; education and support being in most cases an absent part of current supervisory practice. This would accord with the shift noted by Wilson (2008) and Noble and Irwin (2009) as a move away from supervision as being seen as a tool of the professional social work to a being a management tool.

Reflective supervision is seen by the Social Work Reform Board (2010, 2012) and the Munro Review (2011) to be a key part of effective, high quality social work practice. Reflective supervision can be defined as supervisors and social workers critically looking together at a specific piece of casework and testing the decision making in that case by drawing on available theory research. Also the social worker's part in the casework transactions with the client would be considered; self-awareness being a key component of this type of supervision. There are different reflective models that can be applied to reflective practice and supervision.

Gibbs (1988), Ruch (2002, 2005, 2007) and Taylor (2010), chapter 2 (2.16) p.50, all offer models that could easily be adopted into a supervision practice; facilitating the continual development of analytical skills and helping both supervisors and social workers identify learning needs. An opportunity to sit and reflect as offered by reflective supervision encourages social workers to think and review their reactions to service users. Fook and Gardner (2007) argue that critical reflection unsettles assumptions that workers may have and challenges orthodoxies. Laming (2009) is explicit that open and supportive supervision focused on the quality of decision making, good risk analysis "improves the outcomes for children rather than the risks" (p.32) The context of supervision is to reflect on actions and to ensure that decision making is not based solely on intuitive judgement with all its attendant risks. In this research supervision was seen by six participants to focus predominantly on their decision making and target achievement.

This finding confirms those findings of Bradley (2008), and Jack and Donellan, (2010) and resonates with my professional experience. Laming (2009) states “deliberate reflection on social work practice is being put in danger because of an overemphasis on process and targets” (p.32). He goes further to argue that “regular high quality organised supervision is critical.” (p.32) Supervision has moved in the last two decades from a rounded practice in which the worker’s development has a place alongside casework discussions to supervision that is focused on case decisions, the achievement of time scales and targets, with little room for reflection. This was particularly noticeable for those who were working in child care assessment and those in statutory adult services, chapter 4, (4.2.3) p.119.

This change in emphasis in supervision to being managerial rather than concerned with the development of the professional social worker affects social worker’s well-being. Ruch (2007) argues supervision needs to be a safe space for thinking and for the integration of thinking into practice and for practitioner well-being. This would include dealing with social worker’s feelings. It is significant that three child care workers did not feel seen or heard by their managers as they struggled in their first year. All three reported that they used partners and friends to talk issues through. This of course does have the attendant issues of confidentiality. There is no research evidence to demonstrate confidentiality was broken but having no space at work leads to issues being addressed elsewhere. This finding connects to the workers feelings of being overloaded. The three child care workers did literally as well as emotionally take work home, for example reports being written in the evenings or at weekends. This reflects the experience of the Jack and Donnellan research (2010) with paid work pressures spilling into non-work spaces.

My research would suggest that employers, managers and supervisors need to be reminded of the original function of supervision within the social work profession and that the supervision space needs to be re-balanced to include space for reflection, education and support. One possibility could be some form of supervision training for supervisors and managers which includes learning about the newly qualified workers’ needs and ASYE schemes. This finding points to the

pressures on managers to achieve targets and deadlines and the inherent tension that this causes with regard to the provision of supervision as an activity that looks at more than just target achievement; that is, a return to the principles of best practice supervision. Such a change would need a system that recognised that reflection on practice, personal support, education and the sharing of knowledge and research alongside managerial objectives, were all legitimate uses of time in supervision.

There were some opportunities to reflect on aspects of social work in the group supervisions. Group supervisions were part of the ASYE/NQSW programmes. These were valued by the all participants. Group supervision is where several social workers come together with a supervisor or an experienced worker or consultant to look at cases and matters of practice. Group supervision offers a forum where workers can learn together and share knowledge and information. Jack and Donnellan (2010) also found that group support was seen as a good aspect of group supervision. In my sample it would seemed that group supervision gave participants re-assurance that some of their concerns were shared by others, it was not just them that was having this experience. However, for the frontline service workers in child care it confirmed their feelings of being bombarded, being unprotected and having no respite from relentless referrals.

On a more positive note the open door policy adopted by all the supervisors of the individuals in this research sample was seen as re-assuring and gave individuals confidence that urgent matters could be dealt with between formal supervision sessions. An open door policy is that managers, when they are not in meetings or supervision, are happy for workers to come and discuss issues with them without a prior appointment or outside a formal supervision session. For some workers this was not possible as the manager/supervisors were based elsewhere or the managers shared an office and the worker was aware that others would be listening. Allied to and as argued above by Fook and Gardner (2007) a component part of supervision is critical reflection on practice.



### 5.18 Reflective practice

All participants said that they were familiar with the concept of reflective practice, chapter 4, (4.2.3) p.119. This did confirm my expectations from the literature. However, reflective practice was spoken about as considering your work, as in what happened at a particular visit and how this may be followed up in the next visit. Participants talk of using journeys between visits or on the way home as their reflection time. This can only be considered partial reflection. This type of reflected practice would be described by Ruch (2002, 2005) as technical reflection concerned with explanation and problem solving. What did I do? How can I do it better? The connection with theory and the use of self in the work being undertaken by the social worker appeared to have no place in the reflective process as described by the participants.

Schon (1983, 1987), Ruch (2002, 2005, 2007) Fook and Gardner (2007) and Taylor (2010), chapter 2 (2.16) p.50 all argue that holistic reflective practice is a complex process which includes the dynamic interaction between client and worker: What was the worker's part in that interaction? What were the assumptions that the worker carried into the work about the person/people involved? What is the context of the client? What knowledge is informing and constructing the worker's views? What assumptions are being made? Arguably this is not a task that can be done while driving. The social worker needs time and space to reflect. The journey in the car between visits or on the way home can give the opportunity for individuals to have initial thoughts about their work to be used for a more comprehensive period of reflection later, but it would not, in the light of the models cited offer an opportunity for a holistic review of the visit or interview with a family or service users.

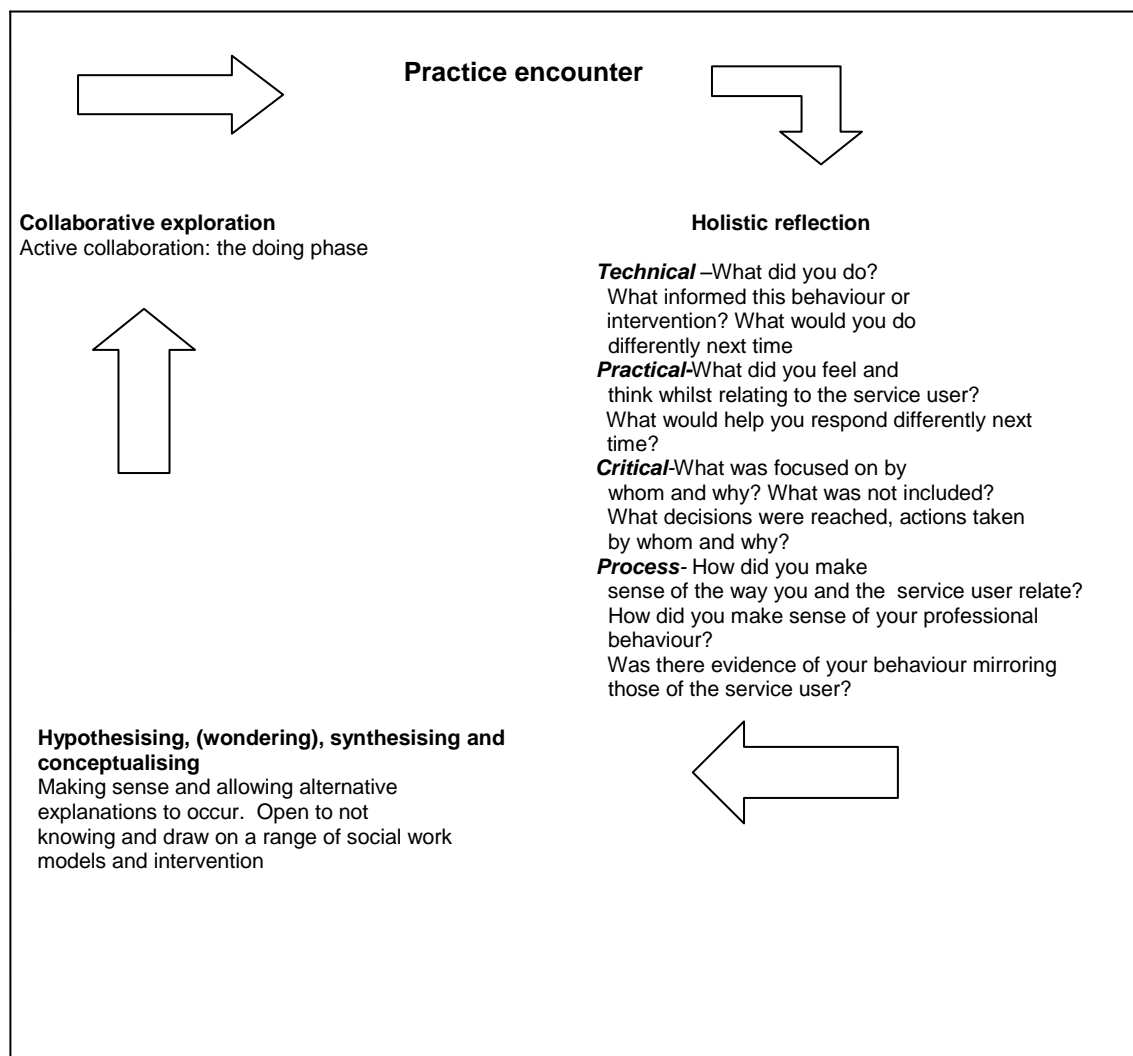
Ruch (2004) in her research into child care teams discovered that the organisational context and the frontline managers in particular were crucial for reflective practice to thrive. Case management supervision in a target-driven culture does not present forums for workers for reflective supervision. Taylor (2010) describes reflective practice as needing a critical friend to help unravel practice situations. In a social work context this would usually be the supervisor

who would enable the worker to connect with their work and holistically review the processes within the case and the worker's part in that, alongside enabling the worker to make decisions in the interests of service users.

Wood et al. (2008) synthesised a model (see Figure 9 below) from the work of Ruch to demonstrate holistic reflection and its component parts. This model would offer a tool to workers and supervisors to undertake reflective practice and reflective supervision.

**The work of Ruch synthesised by Wilson et al (2008).**

**Figure 9**



From the participants' responses it seems that there needs to be a huge shift in the organisational mind-set from being target and timeline driven to an organisation that embraces the need for workers to holistically reflect on their work. This shift would need to be modelled throughout the organisation. Participants' experience suggests that the current model of supervision used within social work organisations is not reflective but target-driven, concerned to ensure that deadlines are kept, thereby keeping senior managers at bay.

I would suggest that from these findings and analysis the profession seems unclear about the baselines and key components of reflective practice. How would the profession describe a reflective practitioner? Are there key concepts that need to be included into a social work model of reflective? Everyday social work practice would expect that a social worker thinks about the visit or interview that they had just carried out; this is because every social work intervention however small is recorded. This is different from reflective practice as described above and in the diagram of Ruch's work by Wilson et al (2008) (Figure 8, p.184). My research would suggest that a debate in the profession would inform how reflective practice is taught in universities, in practice placements and used within employing authorities.

The Munro Review (2011), and Social Work Reform Board (2010) both look to shifting the culture of social care organisations from a service focused on targets and processes to one that is focused on delivering a social work based on theory in response to a range of complex human issues. This stance is also echoed in the National Health Service response to the recommendations of the Francis Report (2013). This report states "In a busier NHS, we will ensure that paperwork, box ticking and duplicatory regulation and information burdens are reduced by at least one third." (p.25). In relation to nursing staff the report sets out practice principles called the, "6C's", Care, Compassion, Competence, Communication, Courage and Commitment. This is heralding a movement from the process driven ways of delivering health care to a more relational service.

My research points to the conflict that is inherent currently in social care with a managerial line which is focused on targets and social workers trained to work in

relation to principles and best evidenced practice. The current tensions are summed up by participant R.

*“what you are doing is trying to sing to two masters, you have the local authority that has its targets its Ofsted inspection and then you have your professional accountability. You could lose your job but you wouldn’t want to lose your, your profession, often they are in conflict with each other” R.2.348*

This research suggests that if reflective practice is to be a tool for social work then the context of the organisation needs to respect and provide opportunities for the practice of reflection both as an individual activity and in supervision. A more deliberate association with reflective practice throughout the organisation would legitimise time, space and energy being spent in this way. As I have indicated earlier reflective practice is seen as a key component or tool of professional practice however it appears that neither those supervising recent graduates nor the organisations employing them understand reflective practice and its place in social work.

#### 5.19 Communication and Administration

Communication according to these participants is a term covering a wide variety of activities, chapter 4 (4.2.4) p.125. Participants spoke about the need to be a good communicator both in person and on paper. Included within the heading of communication were co-ordinating networks of people from multi-disciplinary settings to ensure that a service user or child and family get the service that they need and that the services are in line with the policy and procedures of the agency. Social workers are often the key professional in the networks surrounding service users. The social worker feels responsible for ensuring that everyone understands what is happening and who is responsible for which task. This, on occasion, includes telling services users that they will not receive a service. These communication skills, particularly co-ordinating and chairing meetings, are not skills that can be completely learned in training as a student social worker seldom gets to chair meetings or be responsible for decision-making in casework. These are skills which come with experience.

Another aspect of communication about which participants commented is the connection between communication and administration, chapter 4 (4.3.3) p.135. In order to have an audit trail conversations are recorded on case files and particularly with professional colleagues are followed up with e-mails. Bates et al (2010) found that newly qualified were unprepared for the recording, report writing and time management aspects of the work. Munro (2011) articulated that in child-care there was prescriptive guidance, increased use of databases, tick box assessments and recording systems that were compute-based. There are large electronic data systems in child care and adult services that a newly qualified worker is expected to know their way around. Lack of induction and support to newly qualified workers shows up through their lack of knowledge about everyday systems within their organisation.

Participants, chapter 4, (4.3.3) p. 135 were shocked by the huge amount of form filling and reports to be completed that there are in all areas of social work. Participants said that they spent four times as long filling in electronic forms than they spent with their clients. An all-party parliamentary inquiry into social work (2013) was given evidence of social workers grappling with technology unfit for purpose and that social workers spend 70% of their time on computer focused activities. This does seem a disproportionate figure. Face to face contact with clients represents the smallest part of the working week. Administration and communication take up a large amount of social work time.

This research was taking place as the Munro Review (2010) and the Social Work Reform Board recommendations were relatively new, my fieldwork being done in 2011 and 2012; however, there was no evidence that the administrative burden faced by social workers had in any way changed. If there is no change then I fail to see how time can be created in the social work working week for more face-to-face work with clients or reflective practice and supervision: Many of the timelines in decision making appear to be driven by the administrative structure and context of the work, not by the evidence of best practice and research.

## 5.20 Professional stages of development: the path of the professional.

This research spanned the first year of practice for newly qualified social workers. My analysis of findings suggests a path of professional development over time: This finding accords with such writers as Benner (1984) chapter 3, (3.4) p.68, Friedman and Kaslow (1986) and Ronnestad and Skovholt (2003), chapter 2 (2.8) p.30. These writers looked at development of the professional from the perspective of different stages or phases of a professional journey. Benner (1984) for example argues that a novice practitioner is characterised by being rule orientated. This rule orientation is because novice practitioners have little practical work experience on which to base decisions. Friedman and Kaslow (1986) in their model look at the more psychological aspects of the professional journey. Their study follows the development of counsellors basing their ideas on the use of supervision and practitioner confidence. This developmental path moves from a starting position marked by excitement, anxiety, lack of confidence to a final position of being a practitioner with a firm sense of professional identity. Ronnestad and Skovholt (2003) take a long term view of professional development phases from lay person to expert. This is seen as a journey over about 30 years. The phase of this model which is particularly important to this research is that of "Novice Professional" (p.17) this is seen as the first five years after graduation.

These models show common aspects in professional development and suggest that there is a pathway to professional development in allied professional groups. These phases of development have different tasks to be completed and are experienced differently by individuals.

An aspect of the developing practitioner which is not noted in the studies of Brenner (1984), Friedman and Kaslow (1986), Ronnestad and Skovholt (2003) is that of the professional learning to pace themselves in the work and deal with the demands of being a new practitioner. A key aspect in the journey of all the participants was the pace of change, as noted in chapter 4, (4.2.1). This pace of change and volume of work meant that the practitioners who had not experienced this in training were left trying to manage their time. The outcome for some

participants was not just to feel overwhelmed but to work extra hours in order to feel that they were keeping some control of the workload.

This professional journey is only one aspect of transition another is the emotional and psychological aspects that might be experienced.

### 5.21 Pressures as part of the journey

The journey of transition a graduate makes on leaving university training and moving to their first qualified practitioner's post is not a straightforward linear pathway. In the day to day lived experience of newly qualified practitioners, they are subject to a variety of pressures from their job, family, friends and most importantly themselves. Figure 10 is a depiction of some of the areas that exert pressure on a newly qualified social worker.

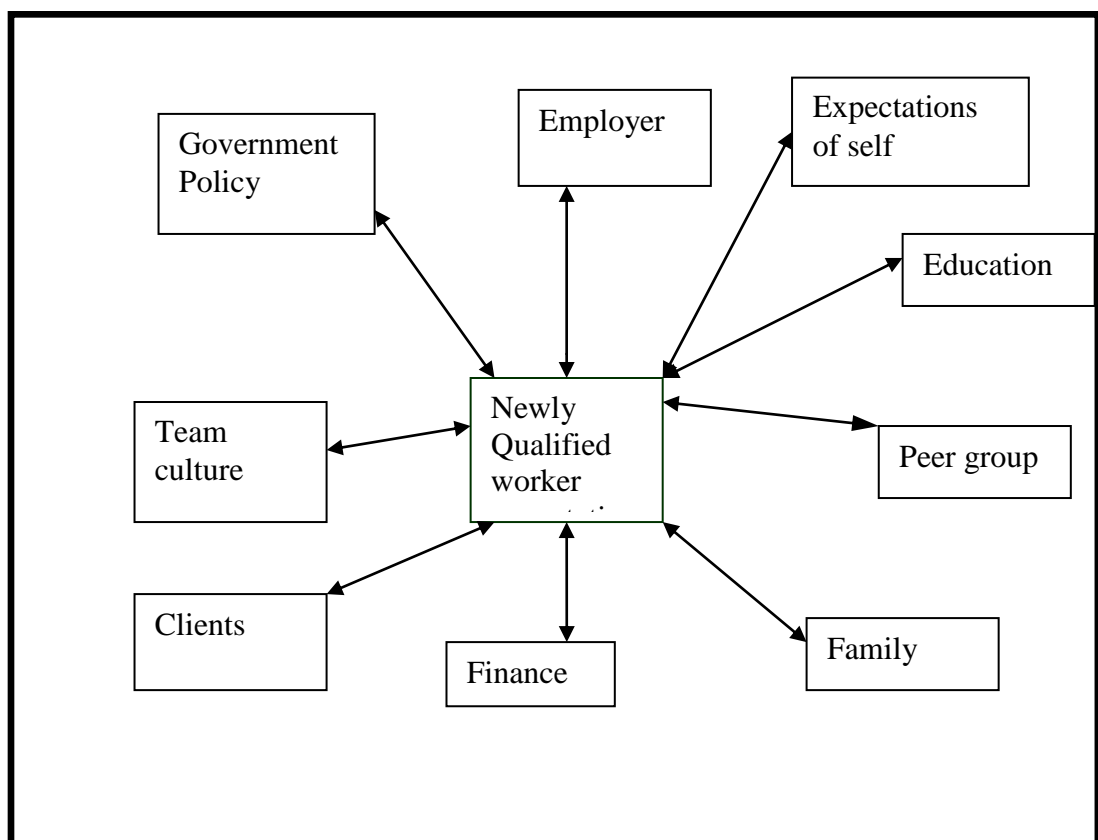


Figure 10: Pressures on an NQSW

## 5.22 Conclusion

I would suggest that the participants' words configure three distinct strands within an overall transitional journey from their known life as student social workers to the new and unknown life of a qualified social worker: a phased development strand; a psychological and emotional strand; and a professional strand. These strands of transition are unique to the individual; however, they do share and show some common characteristics. Each journey is affected by the context in which the journey is being undertaken. These individual journeys will have their own time sequence and progression.

The phased journey is a chronological journey through time. The professional and psychological elements will have their own time frame and hold both the possibility of progression at a forward pace as well as the possibility of regression. Individuals can experience the different time sequences of each strand. For example, the professional journey starts with the expectation of others that the individual who has the title of social worker knows what their job is whereas the individual may be experiencing the shock of the reality of the job they have taken. An individual may be making a smooth forward progress in their professional strand but a supervisor or change of office might create regressive feelings: for example, needing the new supervisor to provide affirmation and reassurance as if one was a beginner. In this situation the individual may be experienced by those around them as having lost ground.

My model suggests that attention needs to be paid by employers to the different phases of development and to the psychological/emotional impact that is experienced at different times throughout the ASYE year. For example in Phase 2, Beginner in the first three months of their new job as a qualified practitioner the social worker experiences the professional world for the first time as a qualified practitioner and their experience is that all is new and unknown. This brings with it feelings of both anxiety and excitement. A concentrated planned induction tailored to individual needs may help an NQSW to enter the next phase, 'Settling in' phase 3, more quickly and ensure that the newly qualified worker feels contained enough



to deal with the anxieties they have about responsibility and accountability. Alongside this, clear information about the supports available to the NQSW and opportunities to reflect on practice issues, via supervision and peer group activities, could offer the security that will enable the individual to settle and perform more effectively and efficiently. Lack of attention to the psychological issues that appear to be involved in transition exacerbates individual concerns. For example, participants W and N, who had a clear planned induction and experienced a gentle introduction to the workplace, did not describe feelings of being overwhelmed or unsupported. Although the ASYE experiences focuses on one year I would suggest that employers emphasise the first three months of practice as a key time. In this period feelings of safe and secure bases and a clear support system are vital. Without this, individuals appear to struggle even when they are in familiar services and localities.

Another aspect of the first three months is the ability to find a balance between work and home life. Emphasis on time lines and individual objectives appears from this data to take precedence over good practice. At a time when individual social workers are trying to operationalise the good practice that they have been taught in professional training there seems to be a conflict with the pressure upon them to perform in relation to timelines set by their organisation. Participants P, R, T, all refer to being asked to participate in poor practice in order to be in line with service expectation. This for one of them led to doing large amounts of overtime, losing the work and home life balance in order to complete assessments and reports on time without compromising her professional practice. This might point to a gradual increase of caseload over the first six months, to be consolidated in the last six months allowing individuals to get use to the time frames and ways of working gradually.

I would suggest all three strands of my model need to be addressed to enhance the newly qualified social worker's transition experience.

## **Chapter 6: Discussion of the Methodology**

This section aims to illuminate some of the methodological issues encountered and my experience of using the methodology adopted for this research study. This exploration of the methodology will include a personal account of my experience as a researcher and consider the strengths and limitations of the research.

### **6.1 Chosen methodology : Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)**

I chose a qualitative research method as I wanted to understand the experience of individuals as they graduated from university, having completed their social worker training to take up a job as a qualified social worker. Further, by understanding the experience of participants it could be possible to offer insight into this phase of a newly qualified social worker's career with the possibility of creating a model of practice which could facilitate a smoother transition from university to a first qualified post. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, chapter 3 (3.5) p.72, offered a good fit to both my research and my requirements of a research methodology. I had decided that the methodology that I adopted had to fit with my personal values and principles. That is, a methodology which was based on the experience of the individual participants but would enable the inclusion of both divergent and convergent themes from that experience. This was important as I did not expect each participant's journey to be the same or necessarily have similar features. I was concerned to ensure that individual experience was recognised in the research and that the emphasis was on individual experience and not a pure reduction of those experiences to provide a convergent conclusion, a reduction of views to one view. I felt that the themes of the analysis should emerge from the data and data should not be forced into predetermined categories. Smith et al (2009) acknowledge that the IPA researcher will not come up with a definitive view of the individual's experience but will draw together the threads of the participants' stories and interpret the participants' experience. I wanted to engage with participants to understand their experience of a particular phenomenon, their transition experience.

Smith et al (2009) advocate a non-prescriptive methodology, they write of steps or guidelines for undertaking research. There is not a rigid set of analytic tools to apply. The researcher chooses how to gather data, most choosing interviews. I opted for semi-structured interviews and liked Smith and Osborne's (2003) notion of the participants being the experts in their experience of the topic under investigation: The researcher as a traveller in the participant's world of experience: Participants telling the story of their lives rather than framing their story to answer the questions posed by the researcher. This is similar to my work as a psychotherapist, walking alongside a client, enabling them to explore and make meaning for themselves of their lives. In the research design it was important to me to ensure as much as possible that the participants voices were heard in the research data and in the analysis. The adoption of a semi-structured interview schedule allowed me to have general themes/ headings of subject areas to cover but these were guides. The participants were encouraged to tell their story in their own way. Multiple interviews with participants allowed for rapport to be developed and to offer multiple opportunities for stories to be told. The schedules for the second and third interviews were influenced by the themes from the first and second interviews.

I as a researcher am aware of my influence on the research process and the interpretation of the data. This means what I have experienced in my life will affect how I act as researcher. I will not be objective as I have my world view of social work and this is coloured by my personal experience, what I have read and see about social work in the media. The way I conceptualised my research and my interests in this topic have all been forged by my life experience and my training.

Having read several research studies, Smith (1999) Darker et al (2007), Bolas et al (2007) Stuart-Smith et al (2011) Eleni and West (2012) and Phillips et al (2013) which used IPA, I wondered what differences there were between IPA as a qualitative research methodology and other qualitative research methodologies. I think the difference between some IPA studies and other qualitative methodologies is the attitude of the researchers. Some studies use the method of IPA but without taking time to give a clear exposition of the researcher's stance. This might be because in some peer-reviewed articles the space is limited and

therefore a full position cannot be articulated. In the theoretical writing of Smith et al (2009) it seemed to me that what is different is the attitude of the researcher and their willingness to be transparent with the fact that, as a researcher, interpretations are based on their views, feeling, trainings, understandings and limitations. I am unable to say whether I would have achieved the same rich data without the personal commitment to reflexivity and transparency that I made, but I am clear my reading of IPA as a methodology provided the holding framework for my work.

## 6.2 The beginnings of this research: Choice of topic.

I have written about my process of choosing my topic in the Overview, Chapter 1 and in Appendix I. I think the context is important as it highlights the importance for me of being transparent with my pre-occupations as a researcher. As I was not a full time researcher my work context of being a beginner myself did influence the conceptual framework of this piece of research. It became clear to me that I wanted to understand the experience of individuals making the transition from university training in social work to their first qualified job in social work. This transition mirrors the context transition that I was making from being a psychotherapist in private practice to being seen as a professional teacher for the first time. I also feel that this transitional state has occurred in moving into the space or shoes of being an IPA researcher. Here I am new both to the methodology and the level of academic research. I was on a steep learning curve as were my participants.

## 6.3 Bracketing

Having chosen my methodology and data collection method I began exploring how to conduct a piece of IPA research. One aspect of IPA research Smith et al (2009) write about is the concept of bracketing, chapter 3 (3.3) p.62. Bracketing according to Smith et al (2009) helps to focus the researcher's attention on the phenomena to be studied. The aim is to separate out areas of experience known to the researcher that might influence the research: Bracketing being seen as part

of the reflective and interpretative activity with the research material, not an end in itself.

I had both pre-knowledge and experience of the topic area of transition and social work and how social work training had developed over years. It was not only my views on social work which I needed to consider but also my views on the psychology of transition. I had prior knowledge of the subject area of transition from my practice as a psychotherapist and from my previous research at MPhil level. As a psychotherapist I had insight into how people experience various life transitions, for example the birth of a child, death of a partner, unemployment, geographical re-location. As a MPhil level researcher I had some understanding of the field of transition in a workplace context. All this knowledge would influence my research decisions and to take account of this I adopted bracketing, one method of offering some transparency within the research process.

I began by writing an autobiographical piece that outlined what at the beginning of the study I thought needed to be bracketed. I used my first autobiographical writings to set out a stall of known aspects of myself that may affect my judgement and decisions as I conducted the research. This appears in Appendix I. I was aware that this exercise was only partial. As a psychotherapist I am aware that there is another aspect of myself which is far more complicated and difficult to manage, that of unconscious processes. I have spent many years learning about my unconscious first in a rigorous training as a psychotherapist and subsequently through regular supervision of my practice. Therefore I was conscious and aware of the energy of the unconscious and unsure how bracketing was going to help me with this sphere of influence that I say is ever present in interpersonal relationships. I think that a research interview with a participant, whether a one off interview or a series of interviews, would be subject to the power of the unconscious brought into the space by both researcher and participant. Hendry and McLafferty (2011) believe bracketing to be a continuum: at one end of this there is bracketing as cutting off and separating the phenomena from the world, at the other a process of mental reasoning for the researcher. Findlay, (2008), states that the researcher has to "critically and reflexively evaluate how this pre-understanding influences the research."(p.17). Smith (2009 ) contends that it may

not be possible to know in advance which part of one's preconceptions may be relevant in the specific situation, and preconceptions themselves change in the process of interpretation. Freshwater (2005) writes about the inevitability of bias and notes that researchers can only acknowledge what they are conscious of.

My sense was that, however flawed a process bracketing might be, this was a start at being open to and transparent with the decisions that informed the processes within the research. This cannot be a scientific or objective process as I as a human being am made up of many emotions and experiences and not all of them are in my conscious awareness. The importance is for me, as the researcher, to own that which I am consciously aware of with regard to the topic, as these pre-conceived ideas might affect the decisions that I make in the course of the research and the analysis. I know that bias is not possible to eliminate from the research work. I can only explicate what is known and record new awareness as it arises. For me as a researcher to begin with my own preconceptions and ideas about the work are to be true to my belief in transparency and trusting in the process of self-explication. Each research encounter is an encounter both with the known and the unknown. I cannot control all of the research fields. Bracketing is not a one-off exercise; as the unconscious is brought more into consciousness more material will be revealed. Mantzoukas (2005) explored the relationship between reflection, research and bias, and states if a researcher's bias is both acknowledged and made transparent this moves from being reflective to reflexive.

An example of the material that I was constantly reflecting on and then bracketing comes from my first fieldwork interview in an area social work office. At my first field work interview I was conscious of my feelings of walking into a social work office. I was excited to see how things had changed in the working accommodation for social workers and quickly was saddened by what I saw. I know my experience of those offices affected my thinking at the beginning of the interview. Although this information was recorded in my journal it was difficult to bracket how I imagined these cramped conditions affected the newly qualified social worker's experience of the profession. I also know that the call centre type open plan environment echoed my experience of my university desk and how difficult I found this working environment. All these feelings, thoughts and

emotions were shared in my journal and separated from the interview material. Bracketing became part of the cycle of reflective practice which I as a researcher undertake, a constant review and reflection on what has happened and using insight to inform interpretation.

#### 6.4 Interviews

I chose to interview participants three times over twelve months as I was interested in the experience of transition of individuals who were graduating as social workers and tracking the path of that experience over time. Flowers (2008), chapter 3 (3.9) p.79, states that to interview a participant more than once needs to have a clear justification from the beginning which is advantageous to both the participant and the researcher. I was aware that Flowers further writes that more than one interview with the same participants has the potential for increased bias within the research. Multiple interviews raise the opportunity for both the participant and the researcher to reflect on the dialogue of the first interview before the second and before the third. Here there is the advantage for the researcher who is able to review the transcript and become immersed in the participant's story. This can help build both rapport and trust. Reflecting on the first interview allows for consideration of the main themes, the participant's pre-occupations, and offers the researcher the opportunity to look and reflect on their part in the interview and bracket any issues that have become conscious. This process of reflection holds true for subsequent interviews.

My emotions in the first round of interviews mirrored what the participants told me about their emotions at the beginning their new jobs. I was a bit anxious, excited and daunted by the process that I had begun. I found sitting in a room with a willing participant in my research gave me a clear feeling of responsibility and an audience to whom I was accountable. Six of the interviews were held at the university in surrounding familiar to me and the participants. Two interviews were held at the participant's place of work. Both visits to conduct interviews had a profound effect on me, which was about the difficult environments in which these workers were expected to work. One participant worked alone in a hospital building which was unkempt, cold and unfriendly. I made no comment to the

participant but she mentioned that the security guards came round occasionally to check on her. I was told this in case a guard interrupted our session. The worker did not seem to recognise any personal safety issues about her situation. The other interview took place in a social services centre which looked like an office I had inhabited many years ago, full of paper and files. The interview room was anomic, soulless, and the interview was disturbed by someone wanting to ask the participant a question. The participant said that this was normal and that it would have happened if he had been in a meeting or in supervision. Each part of my experience in this office mirrored the participant's story of their beginnings, the environment in constant flux, movement and disturbance.

Six of the eight second interviews took place in the participants' workplace. One took place at a participant's home which was her office at the time and a third took place at the university this being the participant's choice. I was affected by the working environments of the participants. These feelings came spontaneously and were noted in my research journal. The diary notes added contextual information to the interviews as well as helping me to reflect on my emotional and psychological reactions to the research process, as it affects me and potentially the participants.

As the interview process continued I was aware that I was less shocked by each individual's work surroundings as time went on. This was not to say that I was familiar with the environments, as one participant was in their third different office base by the last interview, but my expectations had changed. I no longer expected the office environment to be warm, inviting, and I was prepared for interruptions.

## 6.5 Transcriptions

Transcribing was a huge part of the data analysis process. The interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed as soon as practicable after the interview. This was within two weeks of the interview. I always transcribed the tapes in one session. These could take up to 6 hours. This process gave me close connection with each interview and allowed me to immerse myself in the participant's voice and emotion. Each participant had my full attention for the time of the interview,



approximately one hour, then I gave the participant my undivided attention listening to their every word while I transcribed the interviews. I was acutely aware of how the mood and dialogue of each interview changed. I noted that some interviewees were more forthcoming than others and that my voice and timbre was different in different interviews. I was conscious to note thoughts and feelings while transcribing which gave insight into the effects of the research material on me as a researcher. The interviews gave the participants a space to reflect upon the pattern of their year and take stock of their journey. I am conscious that another person undertaking these interviews or analysing these interview recordings may have gained different insights, seeing this interview material through a different lens, their lens and not mine. This process of transcription was an intimate experience between me and the participant, their experience became in that moment part of my experience.

This experience of transcription I know affected the second and third interview as the more I heard the participant's experience the more I learned their individual ways of dealing with language and describing aspects of their work. I could hear their voices as I then began to analyse the transcripts, their voices referring to the various aspects of their experience. The research seemed to be alive in my imagination and in my conscious world. I felt like a fellow traveller through time. I felt that even before I was in full interpretative flow, that is in the stage called doing data analysis, these scripts and individual voices were interacting and making meaning in my head, both consciously and I think unconsciously. Smith et al (2009) writes about IPA researchers drawing on a considerable range of interpretation in making connections as part of the process. I feel that this did happen but the material was in a constant state of flux and explication in my unconscious. This then surfaced into my consciousness as I looked at the transcripts for analysis.

It is clear to me that as the interview sequence goes on the researcher and the participant become more familiar with each other and I notice that I could refer to shared information to clarify a point. It also seems that with some individuals I seem more relaxed and that I notice that these individuals are more forthcoming and needed fewer prompts. This familiarity finding accords with Flowers (2008)

who argues that multiple interviews can enable trust and rapport to be established.

The one participant who left the study gave me cause for some concern. I looked at my notes and am aware that her level of stress in her job was palpable in the interview. She was at great pains to tell me that she was alright and that my coming had offered her an opportunity to reflect on her situation and how she was today was not how she always was. She was clear that she had support and that she knew how to access support. However, I was left with mixture of feelings which included sadness. Perhaps the session with me was too much of a reminder of her difficult job? Maybe she was embarrassed by her tears in front of me? Maybe I was just one more task in a full diary and the one that could be left? Maybe the interview was more upsetting than she was prepared for? I will never know as she did not respond to correspondence by e-mail about a final interview. I do know that she did not leave her job as the e-mails I sent were opened and return receipts sent.

The experience raised ethical issues for me, which were worked through in my notes and with my supervisors. I made the decision in the interview that this person was overwhelmed by work and asked her to tell about her support networks. She was clear that she was able to function as a social worker and was able to articulate what she could do to get support in the office and the supports she could draw on away from the office. As an ex-social worker I felt that the pressure as described by this participant was more than a newly qualified worker should be expected to work under even in a front-line team. However I did not feel that the person was in such crisis that I needed to stop the interview or intervene with her employers to safeguard her welfare.

## 6.6 Research log: Conscious recording and unconscious reverie

I was committed to using a research log as part of my research tools. I began at the beginning of the research to write an autobiographical journal. I kept notes both in a book that I carried around with me and diary notes held on the computer. The first issue for me was what to record. There are many encounters and news

broadcasts which connected with my research, what to record and what not to record became a burden. I realised that there needed to be some boundary and space between me and my research material. I was in danger of being overwhelmed by material. I had a longing to keep the “good” research journal or notebook and felt a failure when reading the work of others. Clarke (2005) and Jasper (2005) both write of the benefits of keeping a research journal and their writings sound as if this journal keeping is a neat process, almost clinical, which allows access to decisions made in the course of the research inquiry. However, I feel that my dilemmas were authentic and therefore what I have recorded, however subjective, gives a flavour of my process and brings transparency to the material.

The notes and log included personal issues that affected my research: for example, the death of my beloved dog one year, a life threatening illness and operation for my partner the next, the death of my elderly father and my becoming the main carer for my mother the next. Here the theme of loss having resonance with my research area. The next year the resurgent health of my partner and relocation of my mother to be close by had a theme of new beginnings. These issues were not known to the participants but I needed to consider the impact of these life transitions and events on my consciousness and work as a researcher. I was aware that aspects of any one of these issues could influence research decisions.

Lincoln and Guba (1985), chapter 3 (3.4) p.77, argue the use of a reflective journal in the research offers the reader an insight into the philosophical principles, knowledge and experience that have informed decision making in the process of the research. This assists in the building of trustworthiness. Clarke (2005) writes of the development of her diary from an aide-memoire to an outlet for her emotions. She states that her diary would contribute to the trustworthiness of the research. I wonder about this as I reflect on my own process; I understand that much of what I record is situational and that the context of my life will have affected the thoughts and feelings that I record. My experience is that the reflections and thoughts are much more spontaneous, and this accords more with Larkin et al (2006), who argue that it is difficult to tease apart objectivity and

subjectivity and Findlay (2008), who writes of the tension between having a reductive focus and reflective self-awareness and goes further to consider bracketing information known to affect the research and using it as a source of insight.

I have used my research diary as a way of tuning into my preoccupations and noting them alongside my thoughts and feelings during interviews, which I record directly afterwards as these can offer insight as to how I may have influenced what happened in the interview. In that respect my log is consistent in regard to noting transference and countertransference experiences; that is, the feelings and emotions that I experienced in the interview and whether they were mine or came from the participant: transference being emotions that the participant may have placed on me and counter-transference being my feelings and reactions.

My journal and diarised log entries were made after collecting data, while transcribing and analysing data were recorded and built upon as part of an iterative reflective cycle: the end product being the analysis and the emerging model. My notes are notes to me offering a sense to me about why the decisions that I took at the time were made. This research cannot be replicated with these participants because of all the factors and variables outlined above in the context, the researcher and the participants. These people will never experience being a newly qualified social worker in their first job again, I will never be this novice IPA researcher again, and the world of social work, economic imperatives and the media will have changed. However I could give all my research notes, recordings and journal notes to another person to look at in the manner of an audit to follow the path of my decision making and reasoning and to look at the preconceptions that I have and understand how they affected the interpretations that I have made.

If another sample of newly qualified social workers was taken by another researcher at another time, it would be a very different experience for all concerned. This does not mean that this research is meaningless and this methodology has no place but it does mean that in using a research methodology that is close to participants, and where the researcher walks alongside participants over time, that the stance and orientation of the researcher needs to

be laid bare. This openness enables others to look at the messages from the research and see the generalisation and meanings that have been made in the context of the participant's world view and that of the researcher. One set of generalisations that can help illuminate the experience of another group but the context of the research, the how, why and when it was conducted, must be explicit.

#### 6.7 Reflexivity and reflection: different or the same?

My reading around the subject of reflection as outlined in chapter 2, (2.16), p. 50 confirmed that it is a large body of work which is used in many professions to consider processes and the part that the professional worker plays in the interaction with a client. Reflecting on my work has ever been an important part of my practice as a social worker and as a psychotherapist. It felt natural for this to become part of my research activity. My ability to reflect has moved from looking back at an interview or event and considering what I had learned and what I would do differently in the future to taking my work through a reflective cycle. The process that I have evolved in my own work has the elements as outlined by Ruch (2002, 2007), chapter 2 (2.16) p.50. The cycle begins with looking at the event: What happened? , What informed what I did? What was happening in the transference and countertransference? What were the main concerns? What might not have been said? What sense am I making of all of this? Wondering and considering a strategy for the next sessions and questioning myself and deciding if there are issues for me to take to supervision.

I began this research by holding this as my frame for reflective practice and then entered a confusing space where all disciplines, social work, social science and psychology, seem to use the phrase reflection and reflexivity as interchangeable. I think that drive to look back and reflect on what has happened is only part of what needs to be in place to be a holistic reflective practitioner. This holistic view of reflection is more what I think Findlay(2008) points to when she writes about holding a phenomenological attitude; this, she continues, concerns the attitude of the researcher being open to the "Other" and willing to see the world "in a different way"(p.10.)

Padgett (2008) defines reflexivity as concerning the researcher's ability to examine where they locate themselves in the research. Silverman (2011) states reflexivity is the critical capacity of the researcher to look at their impact on the research process. Lincoln (2002) says that reflexivity is an absolute requirement to understand the researcher's psychological and emotional state before during and after the research experience, and that reflexivity is like an altered state of consciousness which enables discrimination about subtle differences between individual psychological and emotional states. Lincoln goes on to say that experiences in the research process can "create personal and social transformation" (2002 p. 337-8). Askeland and Fook (2009) state that reflexivity is a broad term in social science focused on a call for awareness of self by researchers on experience and action, with a particular emphasis on social location. Henwood (2008) refers to the process of researchers sharing reflections on research process and being transparent in how results were obtained.

In this research I have tried to have a willingness to see "Other" and honour the difference in their view to my own. I have continually looked at my part in the transactions as part of my reflective practice while undertaking this research study. I accord with Lincoln (2002) that it is important to gauge your psychological state before, during and after each part of the research process. To do this provides an opportunity to bracket what might influence and record what you believe has influenced your actions, decision making, interpretations and analysis. Silverman (2011) states reflexivity is the capacity of the researcher to look at their impact on the research. I have taken a critical view of my impact on this study. If I had not held a critical reflective stance to my work I would not have been able to make the process of decision-making and the base of my interpretations as clear as I have.

Having read and developed my own style of reflection, I believe that the difference between reflective practice and reflexivity is that reflective practice is the breaking down of an encounter or event in your work, be that as a researcher or therapist, to look in micro detail at the event or encounter. My own way is to ask a series of questions about what happened and my part in that transaction. Reflexivity is my

attitude and behaviour throughout the research: Being open in attitude and mindful to allow difference to surface. Hypotheses or thoughts about how the research will come to form are held lightly, allowing for what will be to surface and unfold. The researcher needs to consider their part in the project from the beginning to the end and give an account of how they might have influenced the findings.

### 6.8 The process of IPA

The analysis of the data gathered using IPA is seen as an iterative process with the researcher getting more and more immersed in the research material that they have. Smith and Osborne (2003) state “there are no rules about what is commented upon and there is no requirement, for example, to divide the text into meaning units and assign comments to each unit. Some parts of the interview will be richer than others and so warrant more commentary... Initial notes are transformed into phrases which aim to capture the essential quality of what was found in the text.... the researcher tries to make sense of connections between themes which are emerging” (Smith and Osborne, 2003, p.67). This immersion begins with the interviews and allowing the participant to lead the encounter and explore the topic in their own way. The researcher then examines the transcript in line by line detail making some notes and identifying preliminary themes. These themes are then clustered and some headings formed. I followed this procedure and at the end of the first transcript had a series of headings. I then left this script and undertook the same process with the subsequent scripts. Having done this for all first interview scripts I began to draw up a list of themes for each person that were tabulated. This process occurred over time as the interviews took place over a five month period as people joined the research. This time lag was interesting as I did come to each transcript focused on that particular person. I did go through regular reflection and bracketing exercises and recorded my thoughts. This process complete for the first round of interviews, I tabulated the themes and proceeded to the second interviews. The same process of analysis was undertaken for all second and third interviews. The themes were tabulated.

I found that in the first set of interviews the individuals' needed more prompting and that the pattern that arose out of the data followed the prompt questions. However, as the subsequent interviews took place the individuals' experience was clearer to see in both convergence and divergence across the data set. I was surprised, as I thought in the first interview there would have been a great deal of difference as the individuals concerned had very different backgrounds and experiences; however, the process of getting a job, their understanding of the field of social work, and the stress and strains of the job gave the group a homogeneous feel.

The subsequent sets of data analysis showed more divergence across the board. However, there was one individual who always brought difference, however and whenever I considered and processed the scripts. Eatough and Smith,(2009) state that analysis employs levels of interpretation beginning with empathetic sharing of participants' feelings, then moves through a series of levels to a more interpretative place and to a more abstracted and conceptual view of the scripts always grounded in the participants' words and phrases. It was therefore important to include this divergence throughout the analysis and interpretation of the data. This participant was as important as the others and the divergence gave a different lens through which to understand the experience of the participants.

As I made a list of themes for each participant and then tabulated the responses, I suggest that bias was minimised from one script to a second. The building of themes from the data I do not think is any different from other thematic analysis. The crucial difference in the researcher using IPA is being committed to staying close to the data and using not predetermined categories for sorting data. Categories come from close attention to research material looking for convergence and divergence between and within the data sample. Immersion in the data is crucial, as it is this immersion and the consideration of the researchers' thoughts and feelings, noting pre-conceived notions that arise during the analysis, which makes IPA different to other phenomenological methodologies.

My experience of using this method is that the researcher has to be committed personally and professionally to coming to the data fresh and alive to the



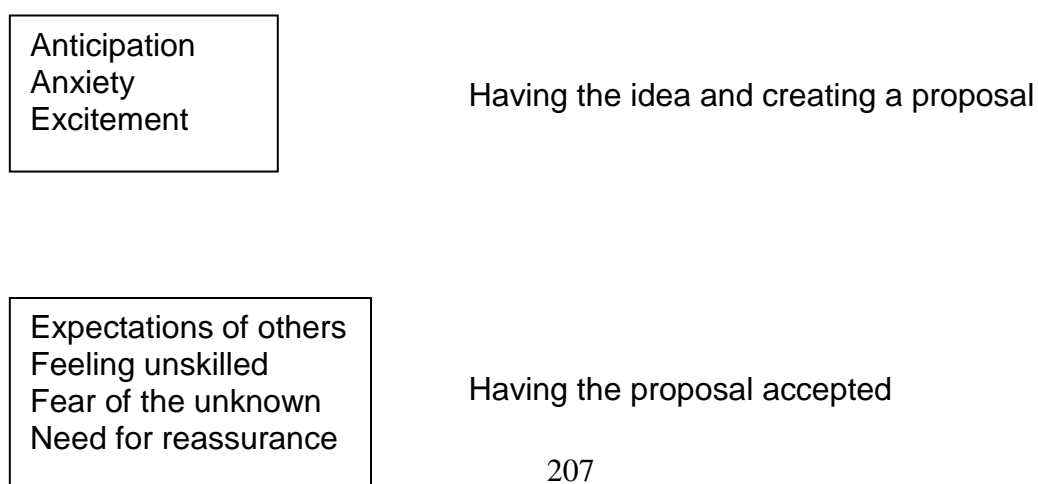
experience that is being shared. It might seem easy not having a framework or categories to fit data into. However, scrupulous attention to detail is required to ensure that the categories come from the data not from the researchers' pre-conceived ideas.

## 6.9 Conclusions

I was a researcher new to using IPA as a methodology but committed to follow a model which had as its centre the importance of the participants' experience and clarity of the researcher's part in the research process. This methodology enabled me to be close to the data throughout the study and to include my own process of being a researcher and my influence throughout the research process while acknowledging that I can only take account of that which is in my conscious awareness. In order to be open to unconscious processes that may be at work in the research context I have had to pay close attention to myself and my psychological/emotional process. This methodology may have limitations, in that to be this rigorous with myself as one researcher in one small project has proved taxing I think that this would be difficult to maintain and monitor in a large research team. To monitor one's own process means owning some issues and difficulties; it may have been more of a challenge for me to do this in a large research team as many of the issues that have arisen have been intimate and personal particularly in the area of loss.

### The emotional/psychological journey of this researcher

Figure 11



Shock Reality of the work Responsibility and accountability	Beginning the interviews, the literature and methodology writing
Disappointment Stress Overload and Pace of change	Too much to do, too much data.
Seeing routes through Stock taking Some sense of satisfaction Some personal resilience/confidence	Confirmation of candidature
Growing confidence/ resilience More awareness of needs Some personal satisfaction	Writing up stage

This journey of transition through the process of the research on an emotional level mirrors the transition of the research participants as we were both on a transitional journey albeit in different contexts. My research journey is to be seen in the context of my day to day life, a few brief details of which are shared above. The strands of my academic, professional and emotional psychological journeys are strands that brought together give the reader a more a more holistic sense of the researcher's journey, and I would argue add to the trustworthiness of the research study.

## **Chapter 7 Conclusions and Recommendations**

On returning to my initial research questions, what is the transition experience of the Newly Qualified Social Worker (NQSW) moving from being a student to their first qualified social work post? What place does reflective practice hold in the working practice of Newly Qualified Social Workers? What place does supervision have in the working life of a Newly Qualified Social Worker? I consider the ways in which my model, Figure 7, p.144 could inform the experience of newly qualified social workers.

### **7.1 Aspects of transition**

This research suggests that there is a process of transition that occurs as a graduate leaves university and moves into their first qualified practitioner's post. My model, Figure 7, p.144 shows the three strands that together form an overall transitional journey: the phased development journey; the professional journey; and the emotional/psychological journey. I argue that this journey is unique to each individual. The individual is affected by the pressures of their context during their transitional journey which will include family, peers, colleagues, managers, friends and wider society through the media and personal contacts. Therefore transition from university to a first qualified social work job cannot be viewed in isolation.

Based on the data, I would suggest that the first year in social work practice needs to be seen holistically, having psychological/ emotional components alongside the developmental phases and the professional learnings, Figure 7, p.144. Much of the current literature has considered practice readiness and the inputs to that first year with little being said about the psychological /emotional issues that are involved in a major life transition. The development phases one to four from my model from leaving university to feeling like a social worker have several aspects of note, but particularly the loss of student identity and start of creating their new identity as a qualified social worker.

Strands within the model do affect each other. If for example the individual has a well-planned induction with a welcoming and supportive supervisor the professional strand is experienced as welcoming and anxiety lessens in the psychological/emotional journey as a newly qualified worker experiences that they will not be “thrown to the lions” (Participant N). However, with an absent manager both in a physical and emotional sense, the professional world is experienced as hostile and unsafe. Here anxiety and a sense of being overwhelmed increases (Participant R). The professional and the psychological/emotional worlds are linked but separate.

My research suggests that there is a crucial time frame within this transition which is between taking up a post as a qualified practitioner, phase 2 'Beginner', chapter 5 (5.3) p.146 and the end of phase 3 'Settling in', chapter 5 (5.4),p. 148; these phases account for approximately first six months of practice. After the first six months most participants reported “feeling like” a qualified practitioner, phased development, phase 4. Participants in this research had very different starting points before entering training. Some had experience of working in social care, others had not; all shared an experience of training at the same higher education establishment. Despite these variations of experience all moved to a position of “feeling like a social worker” after about six months of being in practice. This has important implications for how the first six months of practice at most one year are structured, chapter 5 (5.9) p.157.

## 7.2 Recommendations for Practice

This was a small research study for a part-time academic award. I was a lone researcher with limited time. However, I would suggest that this piece of work does point to organisational practices that could be changed to give a smoother pathway into the workplace from university training. The creation of good social workers is not the responsibility of one particular sector of social care or education, it is more a collective effort which involves national policy, social service organisations, social work educators and individual students. The idea of a transitional journey into practice helps to focus on the before and after of social

work training and shows the importance of making connections to all these aspects of training, context and employment.

There appears to be an issue about the connection or the lack of it between employers and university staff, chapter 5 (5.11) p159. In this sample the university staff and the employers appear to inhabit different worlds which seldom come into contact. There appears to be little cross fertilisation between staff: for example, university staff being present in the practice sites other than to be part of meetings about placements. Few field social workers teach within the university. Clapton (2013) argues for more involvement between practicing social workers and university staff in preparing newly qualified staff for the transition from training to practice. Based on this data I would suggest that closer working relationships would also help to the transition process

**I would recommend more:**

- **More connections between University staff and employers particularly the consideration of secondments in both directions.**
- **More input to students following the completion of academic programmes and before graduation about the realities of finding work and working as qualified practitioners.**

#### 7.2.1 Placement Experience

The placement experience of these participants was variable, chapter 5 (5.12) p.162. Offering and choosing a placement is a crucial activity and I think needs to be treated as such. However, I advocate a systematised process to ensure all students sponsored and self-funding have a equal access to placements. This means that self-funded students need to be made aware of the importance of early decision to their future careers. Those making placements would also need to understand pre-training experience. Alongside this a social work student should not have a placement where there are no qualified social workers on site. This may help to ensure that there are social work role models in every placement. This is important because student social workers can learn much about the

professional practice by working alongside qualified and experienced workers. It also offers opportunities to shadow and attend meetings on some complex aspects of social work that the limited and protected caseload of a student may not offer: for example, a meeting that is considering treatment orders under the mental health act or court proceedings in relation to a child.

My research would also indicate the importance of statutory experience. Student social workers do need to experience the atmosphere and pressure of a front-line statutory service, particularly individuals who know that they will be returning to such posts as they are sponsored students,

**I would recommend that:**

- **All placement makers to be qualified social work practitioners able to assess the various pre-training experiences of social work students.**
- **All students to have a statutory placement in the work sector which they either are going to return to if sponsored students or where their interest lies if self-funding,**
- **Higher education to make self-funding students aware of the importance of their placement choice to future career options.**
- **Qualified social workers on site at all placements bases.**

#### 7.2.2 University training and student protection

My research suggests that overall university training is experienced as fit for purpose and enabled them to move into the work place with a good understanding of the basic principles and values of the profession, chapter 5 (5.11) p.159. However, the process of gaining a job was hard for all but hardest for the self-funding students. Those who were sponsored by a local authority were guaranteed work but were given little choice of what kind of work or where they were to work. The majority of participants experienced the transition into work as bruising and that they were not protected in the way that they had expected. The pace and volume of work for the majority was experienced as huge and the most shocking factor of moving from being a social work student to a qualified

practitioner, chapter 5 (5.7) p.152. This may point to a reconsideration of how to help students understand the pace and volume of the work and the pace of change within the profession. I wonder if students in some placements are sheltered from the realities of social work as experienced by qualified practitioners.

**I would recommend re-consideration of how to assist students to understand the realities of social work practice post qualification.**

### 7.2.3 ASYE Programmes

The ASYE programme is a one year long and therefore offers a good opportunity for a structured programme which tapers from lots of support and inputs at the beginning to more independence towards the end. This suggests that employers need to have a clear expectation of the skills and knowledge that they expected at the end of an ASYE programme and via individual learning agreements ensure that appropriate training is delivered. The current programmes do not appear to be explicit about the expectations of skills and knowledge employers expect to have been assimilated by the end of the first year in each specialist area, chapter 5 (5.16) p.173.

As there appears to be no general agreements between employers about the components of an ASYE programmes, I would suggest this has implications for job transfers between employers. What meaning does completing an ASYE programme have? Each individual will have to outline exactly what training and support that they received. I would go further to suggest individual practitioners may get penalised because of the employer's programme during their assessed first year. That is, employer X may not think that employer Y's programme has adequately prepared the newly qualified social worker for their specialist post. I cannot see how this will be resolved as once an assessed and supported first year has been completed it will travel with the social worker as one element of their CV until other experience eclipses it. I would suggest this will be most evident as the first ASYE's move between employers and across sectors. Will

ASYE training be a factor influencing and affecting a social workers future employment?

The portfolio element of the ASYE programme was considered by participants to be an exercise which was not appreciated and felt by several to be a chore. It seemed to them that they were duplicating work and not furthering their learning, chapter 5 (5.16) p.173.

**I would recommend:**

- **clear written expectations of ASYE's from individual employers for each specialist work area.**
- **consideration be given to a non-portfolio based task for ASYE's to complete maybe a reflective journal to show their development over their first year of practice.**

#### 7.2.4 Induction

Part of the ASYE year is individual induction. This sample of participants described induction as not tailored to individual needs, chapter 5 (5.15) p.170. There is reliance by employers on previous inductions, either as a student or as an unqualified worker. This data leads me to suggest that induction needs to be part of the ASYE learning agreement. If this is not done then opportunities are missed to enable the NQSW to have a clearer understanding of the role and expectations of that role that an employer has of them. Lack of induction appears to lead to wasted time both on the part of the NQSW finding out what they need to know to do often routine tasks and the time of those who have to explain procedures, policies and forms to them. I would argue that if an employer wants to ensure that policies, procedures and protocols have been introduced to the NQSW then an induction package is needed for every employee. I would go further to suggest that at the beginning of the assessed first year of employment the NQSW and their supervisor carry out an audit of the NQSW's skills and knowledge in regard to the job that they have taken and then plan what skills and knowledge need to be developed or consolidated throughout their first year of



qualified practice. This audit would lend itself to being divided between immediate needs, policy, practice and procedures necessary for them to grasp the nature of their particular team; I would call this induction; and a second stream of training, skills development and knowledge to be developed during their first year. This would also give the supervisor oversight of the training that an individual social worker was doing, enabling supervisors to discuss training undertaken, learning and developments made in the social worker's supervision.

**I would recommend that all newly qualified social workers receive an induction tailored to their individual needs regardless of their familiarity with the specialist work area.**

#### 7.2.5 Reflective practice and reflective supervision

The terms reflective practice and reflective supervision are used within the social work profession often and usually without a clear statement about what is meant specifically by these terms. I believe this suggests there is confusion in the profession about what reflective practice, chapter 5 (5.18) p.183 and reflective supervision, chapter 5 (5.17) p.177, are. Within the research sample individuals did not name a model that was used by them or their supervisor, except the participant who had moved to New Zealand. A common framework for reflective practice and supervision could be agreed nationally, all areas of social work signing up to a particular model, as in New Zealand, regionally, sector wide or by each employer choosing a particular model. I would argue that the adoption of a clear framework of reflective practice in social work organisations would not only show their commitment to this area of practice but also would make reflection a legitimate use of social work time. I would go further to suggest that if Higher Education taught a staged model of reflection, for example Ruch (2002, 2005), this would ensure that student social workers would be practicing the first two levels of reflection, technical and personal, during initial training, being ready to apply critical reflection in their last year of training, enabling them to be in a position to apply critical reflective practice to their work from the beginning of their ASYE year.

**I would recommend that:**

- **That Higher Education Institutions and employers discuss how reflective practice and reflective supervision is taught in training to ensure that newly qualified practitioners are aware of what is expected of them with regard to these activities.**

#### 7.2.6 Team working

One of the more surprising findings relates to the role of the team in the life of a practicing social worker and team working both as a concept and in practice. All participants referred to themselves as being members of work teams but I gained little insight as to what this actually meant. I would suggest that more research is needed in this area. My own view is that these participants were part of large social work teams. The team appeared to represent a management or resource group. Within this large team there were sub-teams that were led mainly by senior social workers who provided supervision and support. These sub-teams could be work-focused: for example, an assessment and intervention team may have a small group, a sub-team who work to cover the intake of work function for a geographic area; or the sub-team may not function as a team but comprise individuals who all had the same supervisor. I would suggest that these sub-teams need to have a clearer identity, which would offer a sense of belonging and offer possibilities for informal support among the membership. Focusing these teams around supervisors I think would help NQSW's to have a sense of identity. In smaller teams it would also be the supervisor who would offer induction to a new staff member and thereby begin to build a relationship with that person. This offers the opportunity for the supervisor relationship not to be solely case management focused. This style of working may also offer the potential for teams to reflect on the work that they are involved in via formal group supervision.

**I would recommend revisiting the notion of the team as a work and supervisory group considering the purpose of teams giving them a clearer identity.**

### 7.2.7 Well-being

This research would suggest that little attention is focused on the well-being of staff at the beginning of their careers. I would suggest that the emotional and psychological welfare of newly qualified social workers is not a key aspect of the support packages offered to them. Supervision has moved away from the three aspects of support, education and administration/managerial as described by Kadushin (1976), chapter 2 (2.14)p.46. Most attention is currently focused on the managerial functions, chapter 4 (4.2.3), p.120. Six participants reported working unpaid overtime in order to staff on top of the workload, chapter 4 (4.2.4) p.124. For the three child care workers this meant working at weekends and in the evenings and a feeling that they could not switch off from work. These issues were not shared with supervisors and individuals felt unseen and unheard in their supervisory relationship, chapter 5 (5.7) p.152.

**I would recommend that the emotional and psychological well-being of staff is seen as a key aspect of supervision.**

### 7.2.8 Concluding thoughts

As already acknowledged this is a small sample of practitioners which covers both child care and adults services social work practitioners. It is striking, however, how these two streams of social work engage with the newly qualified workers. The child care workers do get more inputs and more payment for their work. These workers, although they speak of being overwhelmed, did get offered more structured training and group supervision/case discussion time than the majority of the adult services workers. I wonder if this is pointing to the greater divide between adult service social workers and child care social workers than is openly acknowledged within the profession and does this signal a two-tier service evolving? As raised by the participants, some adult services tasks do not use social work skills, accounting skills are often as important in gaining a care package for a service user. A debate about the future of adult services social workers seems timely.

In order to facilitate transition journeys, employers can assist newly qualified practitioners by creating a safe environment for practice and offer substantive learning opportunities. This includes a work base that is fit for purpose, a clear supervision structure with regular planned appointments, an induction that makes the parameters of the job clear and gives understanding of all the basic tools for the job, particularly policies and procedures. Those involved with newly qualified practitioners also need to ensure that there is space for the individuals to reflect on their work, particularly their part in processes and transactions with service users. A culture that affirms a reflective stance to work enables practitioners to consider their own work without the fear of getting behind and their being seen as not capable if targets are missed. It is important for practitioners to feel valued and that their work matters to the organisation. Without this structure and culture I suggest that individuals get lost in a system which feels overwhelming and stressful. In this research the most graphic examples of this came from front-line child care workers who felt unseen and unheard by the organisation for which they worked.

A very positive note from the research was the passion that all the participants have for the work. Several were not happy with the organisation in which they worked and the way that they were expected to operate as they felt this was against the principles of best practice: they were dedicated to working with their service users in either adult or child care services. I believe that several of the recommendations and suggestions for changes in practice would enhance social workers' well-being in the workplace.

### 7.3 Recommendations for further research

This is a small research study into the experience of newly qualified social work practitioners. My model that emerged from the research analysis may be applicable to similar and allied professions to social work. I would suggest that the model could be tested in a small comparable study with allied professions, for example teaching and nursing, to consider whether there can be any comparisons made with regard to the experience of transition as outlined in this thesis.

The placement experience of these participants leads me to suggest that there is the need for further research to be undertaken to look at the experience of all those involved in placements; the employers, university tutors and students.

The place of reflective practice within the profession does not appear clear from this analysis and therefore I would suggest more research into the use of reflective practice and reflective supervision in social work organisations. Particularly the focus of this I would suggest would be on how legitimate is time spent on the activities of reflective practice and reflective supervision in the context of managerial structures.

The well-being of staff appears as a neglected factor in supervision. I would suggest a piece of research is undertaken that focuses on supervision practice in social work organisations, particularly questioning the experience of social workers with regard to their well-being needs. Is well-being considered as part of supervision practice?

The role of the team seemed to be unclear as a vehicle for mediating the experience of transition. Further explorations of the role the team plays in newly qualified social workers' experience may be helpful in understanding how the newly qualified social worker begins to understand their role as a team member.

#### 7.4 My research journey

In this research I have also considered the journey of the researcher and suggest that the path of the researcher is convoluted. Methodologically the chosen method seemed a straightforward until the process of the research began. Here the issues of transition come into play and for me were akin to the psychological and emotional journey of the student in transition to being a qualified practitioner. At first I was excited but knew that I would be entering a new ground with all the anxieties that would surface there. Having my research proposal agreed put me in-touch with the expectations that I now had of myself and expectations from those around me. I found myself feeling unskilled and diffident about the skills I

did have in research. When participants began to agree to join the research I was relieved but daunted by the work to be done. Once I began the interviews the responsibility and accountability to my participants became a reality. I felt the way that the participants seemed to acknowledge that this research was important to them, me and the profession. Undertaking a part time academic programme is hard as there is a constant balance of work, home and study. I felt overwhelmed by the data and under a great deal of pressure, mostly self-inflicted, to find a way through the analysis. As I did that, my confidence grew and the confirmation of candidature exercise was a real turning point. This milestone gave me the acknowledgement that others felt there was merit in my study. This feeling sustained me through the last stages of completion. I suggest that this type of description of a transition journey is applicable to many transition experiences, particularly for those leaving university and entering a qualified professional post for the first time.

I would add that I feel that the reflexivity that I have brought to this research study shows openness and transparency to the process and adds to the ethical integrity with which the work was conducted.

Alongside my emotional/psychological issues of being a researcher, I also was undertaking this degree within the university where I worked and at the outset felt that I was therefore in a spotlight of my academic peers. My line manager was my first supervisor, another colleague the second supervisor. This did skew my relationships with these people. It seemed to me that I was not fully in the place of adult learner/student as these people were also my colleagues and I met them often in their academic and management roles. The more confidence I gained in my research data and analysis the more relaxed I became in the role of student researcher.

This journey as a researcher has been profound and put me into complex and complicated relationships to myself. I have been both moved and at times overwhelmed by the complexity of the work that these newly qualified practitioners carry on behalf of us all. Transition is an unclear and clouded state between two stable states; this research has left me feeling that social work as a profession is

in transition and I wonder if it will always be in that confused and somewhat chaotic space until social workers begin to challenge some of the managerial views of social work that seem to have become its bedrock and those engaged in the profession begin to debate what purpose, meaning and values the profession holds in the twenty-first century. A holistic reflection on the professional path seems timely.

Perhaps T.S.Elliot (1944) offers a starting point

*We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time*

Little Gidding (p.5)

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## **Appendix 1**

### **Conscious preconceptions and knowledge**

To examine the experience of newly qualified social workers will involve a prolonged engagement with the participants to look with them at the meaning they are making of their experience in their first year of professionally qualified practice. I need to come to this work clear about my own bias and therefore the influence that I might unconsciously bring to this enquiry.

I have trained as a psychotherapist which has meant training in psychological theory, personal therapy and reflection upon my practice. This has taught me self-awareness and enabled me to understand myself with deep psychological understanding. This understanding is not just in relation to my clinical work but about myself. A development of this is the concept of self-supervision that is questioning my own practice in relation to my own motivation, my own part in transactions and the emotional impact that I receive from my work i.e. supervision as part of practice, reflection in action as well as reflection on action. This is however only part of my reflective process and I always look to context to see if I can understand more of what is occurring around an individual or a group process.

My interest in reflective practice and how this skill is developed and used has increased since I have been teaching counselling. As I heard and spoke to social work colleagues about reflective practice, I wondered in the years that I had been out of social work practice how the skills and knowledge of being a reflective practitioner had developed in the profession.

I realised that although I have not been in the profession for some years, I still hold clear views about social work and social workers and know that these views not only motivate the research but also influence the way I want to engage with social workers

Thoughts and beliefs which have a bias:

I believe in social work and want the profession to grow and blossom. I believe that social workers can be helped to develop (and not get burned out) by the use of good casework supervision alongside workload maintenance. I believe that reflective practice is a useful skill for self-care and well-being as well as for creative case work.

I hold a firm belief that life and our journey through life has within it a series of transitions, some minor some major. In some instances life itself the pattern of our growth and development is a transition. This brings with it tasks of growing and development in a biological, psychological and spiritual way. There is a process of transition that all individuals pass through when moving from one state to another e.g. home to school, school to university, adolescence to adulthood, being a woman to being a mother. Other tasks, such as applying for a new job, have an actual and psychological journey as well as for some a spiritual journey. However, I do not feel that this is the aspect of transition that I am most interested in. For me it is the experience of the actual physical journey and the psychological aspect of that which I find intriguing. All these transitions need to be managed and seem to have a process of their own: From the stable through uncertainty to the stable again. In the process individuals can suffer a large number of symptoms which can be debilitating and frightening. The transition can take over the person's life; every waking hour. There are ways of dealing with transition which can include using a transitional object. A transitional object for me is supervision. I use the supervision space to unravel my thoughts. This can be in the clinical sense or with a peer, for example when developing a workshop ensuring that I have not had a blind spot in the content or the process of the event. Supervision is also a way that as a psychotherapist I can use as a space to reflect on my practice and my current pre-occupations: Taking me out of the direct need of action, giving a space for quiet reflection and help with unravelling where I am in a situation by talking with a knowledgeable other. Reflective practice is an important skill/skill set to acquire when working with complex situations, particularly involving individuals.

My personal reflections continued and reflection as a technique became more to the fore as another transitional object and a skill I use to understand what is going on around me and what my needs are.

I wondered about the newly qualified social worker what were they using as transitional objects in their process?

How do the newly qualified use reflective practitioner skills in self-care in moving from training to practice in the workplace?

In 1979 I joined a well formed and stable team; I was the one they took a risk on, a white middle class university trained social worker who had never lived or worked for any length of time in a city. Here I was in London: Mental health warrant on my desk as I arrived. I was cared for and protected to some extent in my first years of practice, nurtured and enabled to grow and develop. This was my experience.

I feel many of the issues and concerns about social work practice at present stem from workers' inability to look at situations, be aware of the impact, go to the office, think and reflect, then speak to their supervisor and then act. I remember a colleague when I was about 3 years qualified recounting the fact she was driving to a reported child protection incident and realised as she got closer that she did not know what she was going to do. She reflected, returned to the office, and had a discussion prior to acting.

It is not just social work, reflection and supervision that are important to me. There is also the research process itself. It is important for me to be relational within this research. I am trained to be relational as a therapist and as a social worker apart from my inclinations as a human being. The research participants are not subjected to this research I am interested in their experience and their story and I know that I cannot find out this unless I am involved in their experience. Experience is an individual process and that experience can only be reported on, not observed, and a researcher, however empathetic cannot exactly replicate the feelings and emotions experienced by the participant. Participants reflect on their experience in the process of telling the researcher this allows each participant



room to develop their experience. The process allows both the individual participant and the researcher to be with the narrative: Each story being unique and afforded that space in the data collection process. The researcher then sits with each story working on that narrative before moving to bring together all the participants experience. I do not want to have stories that totally converged as I do not think that individuals' experience can be scaled together into a uniform whole if I am respecting the uniqueness of each participant's journey. For me it is important to respect the individual: their journey their experience not, just the analysis to get a position for the sake of my research study.

## Appendix II

This appendix contains the following:

1. Participant information sheet
2. Participant consent form
3. Initial Questionnaire
4. Interview Schedules      Stage 1  
   Stage 2  
   Stage 3

- 1) Participant information sheet

**"The new practitioners' story: reflections on the newly qualified social workers journey from university training to practice."**

This sheet has been compiled by Clare Walker for her doctoral research study concerning the journey of transition for a newly qualified social worker from being a student through their first year of practice as a qualified social worker. I am specifically interested in reflective practice, supervision and individual well-being in the work place.

I am inviting all those completing a social work qualification at Anglia Ruskin University Chelmsford in July 2011 to take part in this study.

My aim is to gain insight into all aspects of transition for social work graduates leaving the university and entering the world of work. I want to understand how skills and knowledge that have been taught to the individual are used in practice.

The first stage in my research is to ask if you would complete the questionnaire attached to this letter.

At the end of the questionnaire I ask whether you would be prepared to be interviewed during your first year of work as a qualified social work practitioner.

If you are willing please your contact details for future follow up. If you choose to continue I will then invite you to participate in approximately 3 interviews. These will be arranged at time convenient to you over your first year of practice.

There will be no reporting back to the university or employers about individual findings.

The data collected will be stored safely, any e-mails held in code word protected folders. Anonymity will be preserved in the research findings

This work is important as currently there is much debate about the level, content of social work training. It will examine what needs to be developed and built upon in order for newly qualified practitioners to be ready for the tasks asked of them.

The value of this work is to inform trainers and employers of the needs of newly qualified staff.

I hope that the results will be shared with employers and trainers through both academic and professional publications.

Participation in all levels of the research is completely voluntary and that if you agree to take part you can withdraw at any time by contacting me.

I hope that by being involved in the project you will have an opportunity to reflect on your journey and use the opportunity to take stock of what is working and what you need to develop to enhance your practice as a qualified social worker

I look forward to our work together

Clare Walker

Clare Walker can be contacted in the following ways

By e-mail      Clare.Walker@anglia.ac.uk

By telephone      0845196 4982

By Post      Clare Walker  
3<sup>rd</sup> Floor William Harvey Building  
Anglia Ruskin University  
Chelmsford  
Essex  
CM1 1SQ

## **2) Participant Consent Form**

NAME OF PARTICIPANT:

Title of the project: **The new practitioners' story: reflections on newly the qualified social worker's journey from university training to practice.**

Main investigator: **Clare Walker**

Contact details:

**By telephone    0845 196 4982**

**By Post 3<sup>rd</sup> floor William Harvey Building Anglia Ruskin University Bishops Hall Lane CM1 1SQ**

**By e-mail      [Clare.walker@anglia.ac.uk](mailto:Clare.walker@anglia.ac.uk)**

1. I agree to take part in the above research. I have read the Participant Information Sheet which is attached to this form. I understand what my role will be in this research, and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.
2. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the research at any time, for any reason and without prejudice.
3. I have been informed that the confidentiality of the information I provide will be safeguarded.
4. I am free to ask any questions at any time before and during the study.
5. I have been provided with a copy of this form and the Participant Information Sheet.

Data Protection: I agree to the University<sup>1</sup> processing personal data which I have supplied. I agree to the processing of such data for any purposes connected with the Research Project as outlined to me

Name of participant  
(print).....Signed.....Date.....

Name of witness  
(print).....Signed.....Date.....

YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS FORM TO KEEP

If you wish to withdraw from the research, please complete the form below and return to the main investigator named above.

Title of Project: **The new practitioners' story: reflections on newly the qualified social worker's journey from university training to practice.**

**I WISH TO WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY**

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### **3) Questionnaire**

**Questionnaire: Please write as much as you wish**

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<sup>1</sup> "The University" includes Anglia Ruskin University and its partner colleges

**Tell me where you have applied for a job or where new job is and the area of social work that you will be focussing on?**

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**What hopes do you have you have of this post?**

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**What anxieties do you have?**

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**What skills do you believe will serve you best in your job?**

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**What professional needs do you think that you have at this new beginning?**

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**Would you be willing to further assist with my research? If so please give your name and contact details below.**

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- 4) Interview schedules: a) Stage 1  
b)Stage 2  
c)Stage 3**

a) Stage 1

*"The new practitioners' story: reflections on the newly qualified social workers journey from university training to practice."*

This schedule gives indicative areas for the anticipated 3 stages of interviewing. The interviewing of participants will be an emergent process. Each section will be developed using data analysed in the first instance from a questionnaire and subsequently by data analysis of interviews completed. However this is to give an outline of the likely areas of enquiry at this stage of my work.

Stage 1

This will be before where participants are looking for work or as participants begin work.

For those in a job

1. *Tell me about your experience of getting this job – connect to placement experience*
2. *Tell me about you first few days/weeks?*
3. *What have been the highlights and the challenges?*
4. *Did you meet you casework supervisor as part of the process? If not when did you meet? Tell me about that*
5. *What has been offered to you as a professional induction package?*
6. *What skills have you used the most? How and Why?*
7. *What opportunities are there been for reflective practice?*
8. *How have you been looking after yourself?*
9. *Overall how would you describe this experience of transition so far? How has it affected you on a personal level?*
10. *Anything that you feel is relevant that you haven't already spoken about?*

For those with a job who have not started

- 1) *Tell me about your experience of getting this job?*
- 2) *How does this connect to your placement experience?*
- 3) *Have you had any discussions with anyone from your new team since gaining your position. When do you begin?*

- 4) *Did you meet your casework supervisor as part of the process? If not when do you meet? Tell me about that*
- 5) *What has been offered to you as a professional induction package? NQSW package?*
- 6) *What do you think the highlights and the challenges will be?*
- 7) *What opportunities for reflective practice do you expect there to be?*
- 8) *What skills do you think that you will use most?*
- 9) *Overall how would you describe this experience of transition so far? How has it affected you on a personal level? How have you been looking after yourself in this period of transition.*
- 10) *Anything that you feel is relevant that you haven't already spoken about?*

For those searching for a job

- 1) *Tell me about your experience of looking for a job?*
- 2) *What would your ideal post be?*
- 3) *Is this connected to your placement experience?*
- 4) *Tell me about the expectations that you have in your first post as a qualified practitioner?*
- 5) *What anxieties do you have?*
- 6) *What use are you able to make of your training in the meantime?*
- 7) *Describe your experience of transition so far.  
How has it affected you personally?*
- 8) *I wonder how you might be looking after yourself while you are waiting for a job?*
- 9) *Anything that you feel is relevant that you haven't already spoken about?*

#### b) Stage 2

These interviews will take place after the participant has been working for 6 months.

Questions will be framed acknowledging the status of each worker 3 working in social work designated posts following secondment 2 in non social work jobs –

support worker designation 1 in an unqualified social work post on a short term contract.

1) Tell me about your experience of social work in this first 6 months since you took this job as a qualified practitioner ?

This opening questions supplemented by prompts as necessary from questions below

*Tell me what has surprised you most? Why?*

*Tell me what has pleased you most? Why?*

*What's been most difficult? Why?*

*What has been most challenging? Why?*

*What skills are you most using? Why? How?*

*What experience of supervision have you had?*

*Have you been offered training?*

*Where does Reflective practice fit in your work pattern?*

*How have you been looking after yourself?*

2) How does your experience of doing the job compare with why you became a social worker?

3) Is there anything that you would like to share that we haven't covered.

### c) Stage 3 interviews

These interviews to take place at the end of the first year of practice.

Tell me about your experience of your 2<sup>nd</sup> 6 months?

What are the changes from the 1<sup>st</sup> 6 months

How do you feel in your role?

What sort of opportunities/support have you had?

(NQSW programme, reflective practice, supervision, colleagues)

How have you been looking after yourself? Importance of your own well-being where is this in you thinking?



How does the experience compare with your expectations of being a social worker?

How does it compare with your student experience?

What are the differences?

If you were to reflect on your first year what image/symbol or phrase comes to mind?

What is your biggest learning in your experience? Personal and professional

Anything you would like to share that we have not covered

### **Appendix III: Thematic Tables**

**Table 1: Main themes from first interview.**

1P	1W	1S	1T	1V	1R	1N	1M
Sponsorship Returned to old team	Job not a qualified post same team as when as student	Adult services post	Current job unqualified same team as student	Sponsored Process of return	Return to work after sponsorship	Job search No jobs for NQSW's finally gets job	Sponsored: Frustration and health issues
Placement experience not directly used	Placement	Placement experience important to job	Placement Disadvantage	Placement experience: not in this work area	Placement experience Not in this work area	Placements Not in this work area	Frustration of no post
Cuts	Context of social work	Change in the social work context	Context of social work		Context of social work	Anxiety re the future	
NQSW will be on the scheme	Not in a qualified post and in a voluntary agency	NQSW told not eligible for the scheme will try and negotiate package using BASW	Not in scheme	NQSW scheme	NQSW scheme	NQSW scheme	NQSW not at work yet
Supervision		Supervisor		Supervisor not	Supervisor	Supervisor not	Expectations of

not met Workload management goals but no clinical supervision		not met		met	met	met	supervision
Induction not expected		Induction not expected		Induction	Induction		Expectations of induction
Intensity of training	Course v placement	Course intensity		Course intensity		Course	Intensity of study
	Reflective practice	Reflective practice	Reflective practice	Reflection		Reflective practice	Reflective practice
Views of social workers		Disconnection with practice	Reality of social work compared to training		Picture of social work gained from view of others	Degree classification 2:1 door to future	Degree classification 2:1 door to future
Decision making and responsibility		Responsibility/ accountability			Sense of Responsibility		

Communicatio n and the law	Communicatio n and the law	Communicatio n	Communicatio n	communicatio n	communicatio n		
	Awareness and concern for others	Awareness of others	Awareness of others		Struggle of others		
					Challenging first year	Challenge of new job	
			Lack of self confidence	Self aware			Lack of self confidence
Training	Debt  Future	No help to transition  Organisation/s upport	Well being	Realistic	Practical support  Power imbalance  Importance of team	Keeping up to date/ worried about forgetting	

**Table 2: Main themes from second interviews**

<b>2M</b>	<b>2N</b>	<b>2V</b>	<b>2R</b>	<b>2S</b>	<b>2P</b>	<b>2T</b>	<b>2W</b>
Manic/Constant Surprised by busyness of the team	Lots of change Surprised by amount of change	Always busy no breaks and not as much support as should be	Gentle introduction in first few weeks then cases Future only holds more work17 caseload up to 27 or more	Shock to the system Constantly busy	Surprised by the pace of change expects more. Major changes new team manager	Constant assessment and re- assessment	Slow Culture shock
Lack of support	2 cases: Small caseload  Gentle introduction  Protection is clear/Manger aware he had no statutory experience Aware of his needs	Third day put on duty “Rabbit in the headlights”  “thrown to the lions”  Overwhelmed  Lack of support in decision making	Now 16 does have child protection including small babies  Feels pressed to poor practice  Manger not dealing with the feelings.	Caseload of 11 service users  Overall a good experience/ Supportive team Supervisor experienced as looking after the team	39 cases Caseload protection unclear currently has  Good informal support	23 cases  Lots of support is happy with that but the system to met substantial need not available, lack of services	15 cases  Supportive/ Good experience  .  Lots of supervision
Case management supervision	Varied supervision	Lack of regular supervision	Regular case management	Regular monthly	Formal supervision		

<p>Lack of consistent supervision</p> <p>Lack of reflective supervision</p> <p>Reflective practice :in the car</p>	<p>experience</p> <p>Depth discussions/ Reflective practice</p>	<p>Nothing for 2 months</p>	<p>supervision no reflection time</p>	<p>supervision not to the NQSW pattern Supervisor clear that her time is limited.</p> <p>Reflective practice outside the office, while driving, in service stations while away doing reviews in hotels</p>	<p>less that scheme should deliver significant gaps,</p> <p>Supervision as case management</p> <p>Reflection is an individual experience in the car driving back from an appointment</p>	<p>Weekly supervision for 3 months and monthly group supervision</p>	
<p>NQSW programme good others not committed</p> <p>NQSW programme</p> <p>Speakers and articles but discussions limited as individuals not read the papers</p> <p>NQSW reflection on</p>	<p>NQSW another place to reflect not instead of line management supervision.</p> <p>NQSW supervisor</p> <p>Process of NQSW and</p>	<p>Aware of how NQSW in different areas are dealt with differently: mentor/protected caseloads</p> <p>NQSW supervision and speakers</p>	<p>NQSW programme person good and supportive but feels can't take time from casework to do work that is expected</p> <p>NQSW stuff all colleagues</p>	<p>Is on NQSW programme but not much enthusiasm</p> <p>No clarity re what an protected case load is her caseload includes safe guarding</p>	<p>NQSW scheme seems to consider everyone incompetent not sure the type of evidencing being asked to do is helpful more reflection time might be</p>	<p>ASYE</p> <p>Lack of knowledge of what 10% reduction actually means</p> <p>Work to be</p>	<p>Annoyed at needing to do ASYE</p>

practice Caseload clear about protection being 10%	clear about advanced awards  NQSW programme	Lack of time for NQSW portfolio  NQSW as a chore not an opportunity  No time for reflection except at NQSW supervision	seem about the same 1/11 read paper for the last session	Has found scheme very unhelpful just evidencing what she has done and time consuming.  Uses own time as no work time available	better Chore NQSW scheme is time away from the office to reflect every 3 months  NQSW scheme seems to consider everyone incompetent not sure the type of evidencing being asked to do is helpful more reflection time might be better Chore	done for portfolio  Lots of training available	
Overtime, long	Induction although six months after starting was county council induction  Overtime is	Induction	Working over	Straight in no induction as manager new not know her way around either.  Overtime about		No induction to the team	
		Working			Does some		



hours and irregular eating	not an issues	weekends to catch up. Work late to start the week fresh	hours and at weekends	6-7hours per week	overtime but clear needs o keep a work life balance	Overtime 3/4/ hours a week	
No self care strategy no holiday taken only 2 days in six months	Nice to have a break	Timescales as the controlling feature	Feels bitter about the volume of work			Emotional baggage “have I done the right thing for the person” “can I stand up in court”	
Pressure to perform learning limitations is part of the job	Taking time available particular study leave awareness of needing weekends for self and family	Difficulty of switch off from the work	Feels pressured by managers to do the work even if that means overtime.		Pressure to ensure everything is covered aware there could be serious consequences if you don’t	Physical exercise to distress	
There is a history of this person working long hours and at weekends	Learning time management	Continuous pressure	Disappointment with own lack of “gumption” to protect herself				
Need for work life balance	Self care	Relentless visits	Concern about health working continuously this way.	Self care important to stick to her routine			
Needs to be more assertive about her learning needs	Expectations and reality of social work	Lack of self care				Frustration “ why did I bother to train as unqualified workers do the same work as us”	Crisis of confidence when not sure what to do
Difficult to switch off		Concern about burnout	Disempowered		Accountability		
Most difficult thing	Difficulties		Support from home feels	High points is having time with a service	Good working professional	Disappointme	Lack of policy and

was a lack of confidence and the team manager not really being aware or observing her struggle	with the internal departments and not knowing his role/function	Issues of practice collision of Munro and how she is being told to work	unheard at work Tiring work Overwhelming and feels unsafe	user	relationships Awareness of the plight of others who were not sponsored	nt for the service use Doubting self Blame and chastisement in the press of social workers	procedures No clarity of role Stressful
Disappointed	Challenges communication and trust of those in care as social workers always changing	Frustration Surprise at the clickiness, whispers and mistrust, feels alone	No thinking time Awfulness can't wait to get out	Has been attached by a service user that has knocked her confidence Importance of team	Responsibility of the professional qualified worker Skills used most are communication and organising.	Getting more confident about 4 months into the post Responsibility on her shoulders in this conveyor belt type of social work.	Listening Compromise Negotiation Coercing Struggling Venting
Expectations and experience expected to spend more time with people	Different aspects of the post ie varying views of social workers ie fostering and childrens social worker	Pleased when a client said thank you Variety of skills used assessment, analytic issues of time management	Already a plan to move on had thought of paying back secondment money Like work but not the volume	Spends less time at a computer than she thought but not enough time for an annual review maybe just 2 hours	Metaphor of plate spinning Experience of being a social worker as he expected given his previous work history	Dealing with symptoms not underlying problems	
Skills used observation/listening	Different stakeholders and how to manage	Given all assessments that are not section 47 as they are	Surprised by own inability to advocate for herself	Support has	Lack of		Family centre

Despite the difficulties happy in the team	Skills used communication time management and computer system	protected but this seems to increase their work load.	Feels trapped and unheard Has made good professional relationships	been more that she expected and she works less hours than she expected to from her experience on placement.	All services geared around money need accountancy skills as much as social work training	services Panels and their varying interpretations of criteria often because of the view of the chair	not counted as front-line Compared to others my job quite cushy
Experience trying chaotic testing limitations		Stress of the unknown	Had had a difficult case work issue where a complaint was made and felt unseen and heard by the manager felt undermined and unsupported.	For much of her current job you don't need to be a social worker	Believes that child care workers do a lot less of the mundane but also intake and assessment is a production line		Changes every day in how I feel about being a social worker
Lack of team manager support	Career path % of time with client 60/40	manager has made it clear NQSW's not wanted in the team				Social worker as financier	
Awareness of new NQSW joining the team and trying to make their experience better than hers	Tool box Enjoying the work Realistic Changed view of self by end of six months	No resources or direct work Job not what she training to do quick assessment and refer on Enjoys parts of the job		Lack of relationship with those she is reviewing. Skills used: communication which here includes different forms of communication -British sign language, Makaton	Experience in context I is good because he is working and there are lots who are not	Skills: Interpersonal, communication more than non verbal Importance of recording no time to check what has been written with the service user "that is another bit of my training gone"	Unfortunate wages thousands less than local authority workers

			<p>Lack of administrative support</p> <p>SW is time consuming inefficient systems don't help</p> <p>Conflict of professional judgement and local authority timescales</p> <p>Organisational V. professional agenda</p> <p>Aware lots of team miss time scales aware she might work inefficiently but not everyone one is.</p>	<p>Organising</p> <p>The law</p> <p>Time management</p> <p>Chaotic but positive confidence higher</p> <p>Feeling like a social worker but not when filling forms all day</p>		<p>Once an assessment done difficult to change if you want to do so you need to do a whole new assessment</p> <p>legislation informs the work</p> <p>Enjoyment</p> <p>Reflection on work and life</p> <p>Concern for the future as an adult services social worker</p>	
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**Table 3: Main Themes from third interview**

3P	3S	3T	3W	3N	3M	3V	3R
<p>Lots of change incredible</p> <p>Disruption of office moves</p> <p>Still enjoying but huge challenge</p> <p>Reflection is outside work in the car or spontaneously while writing up as case</p> <p>Supervision is case focused</p>	<p>Hectic change of country and specialism</p> <p>More time to reflect and a more structured way to reflect</p> <p>Regular weekly supervision</p>	<p>Complexity</p> <p>Up's and down's</p> <p>Quick turnover</p> <p>Passionate about her job</p> <p>Reflective space</p> <p>Regular supervision</p>	<p>Stressful</p> <p>Intensive input</p> <p>Long induction</p> <p>Proud of her job</p> <p>Reflective practice really important</p> <p>Reflective practice is structured</p>	<p>Hectic</p> <p>3 changes of supervisor</p> <p>Reflective practice mostly alone in the car but also in the office with an experienced colleague</p> <p>Regular supervision each month concentrate on 1 or 2 cases</p>	<p>Glad and sad to finish the first year aware case load will rocket</p> <p>Enjoys her work</p> <p>Reflective practice in the car, done alone</p> <p>Supervision was poor</p>		<p>This participant had been seriously unhappy in her previous post so has now moved with the support of her first team manager</p> <p>Feels more supported and aware that the operating style of the previous manager had had a big effect on her</p> <p>Supervision not about growth about management</p> <p>Issue of feeling undermined a</p>

<p>NQSW a tick box exercise</p> <p>Signed off</p> <p>NQSW meeting good as those leading the groups had a wealth of practical knowledge</p> <p>Used own time to get it completed then signed off</p> <p>Wasn't pushing for protection and if fact has a larger case load than some people</p> <p>Confident that if he</p>			<p>ASYE –a good experience</p> <p>All training she has done is via ASYE</p> <p>Feels</p>	<p>Usefulness of NQSW programme peer support</p> <p>Training opportunities other than NQSW</p> <p>Smalll case</p>	<p>NQSW co-ordinator got her through the assignments</p> <p>NQSW supervision tailed off</p> <p>Manager has been less than supportive.First 6 months needed reassurance had</p>	<p>Unsupported and refusal to do joint visits</p> <p>Not impressed with the NQSW scheme</p> <p>Portfolio a bit of a game a chore</p> <p>Didn't feel the ring fence</p>
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<p>had been struggling that he would have been listened to.</p> <p>Feels that others see the qualified social worker</p> <p>Gradual realisation of his own competence and that of others</p> <p>Experience increases confidence and helps understanding of key concepts like eligibility and risk</p> <p>Aware of competent self after 6 months</p> <p>Image of a book with chapters that reflect the changes in his setting</p>			<p>supported</p> <p>More confident in her role</p> <p>Confidence building was her image</p>	<p>load which his manger supports</p> <p>Progressive change and aware that confidence and experience is building</p> <p>Taking note not rushing to action comes with experience</p> <p>Increased confidence and rushing to do things</p> <p>Words/image phrase: Relief, not burned out and</p>	<p>to come out of her box to get needs met</p> <p>Conditions of team told to work at home or in other local authority premises made the first 6 months particularly difficult</p> <p>Swimming against the tide to catch up</p> <p>At 6 months felt more in control and confidence</p> <p>The year seen as a slow upward line with plateau's</p>		<p>Learned a lot and grown in confidence</p> <p>Change in confidence at about 7 months</p> <p>Frantic word to sum up year</p>
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<p>Worst times have been on duty and the bombardment rate which has lead to being out of control, pressurised, forced into bad practice</p> <p>Feeling responsible on duty for too many spinning plates</p> <p>Manages his time to ensure not working all hours</p> <p>Can switch off</p>	<p>Well being and work life balance are importance cultural aspects</p>	<p>Lack of resources for assessed needs</p> <p>Gap between best practice and what she has to do</p> <p>No relationship with clients</p> <p>Pressure to perform</p>	<p>Flexibility in her job</p>	<p>enjoyable</p> <p>Trying to keep boundaries between work and family life</p>	<p>Image was of hangman's noose explained as tied up in knots</p> <p>Suffocating in paper</p> <p>Pressures of child protection and supporting carers</p> <p>Knows she is in a better place has booked a holiday for 2.5</p>	<p>Unsupported and un safe</p> <p>Spinning plate metaphor</p> <p>Personal learning boundaries and balance</p>
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<p>when leaves</p> <p>Aware that the work has no boundaries everyone is vulnerable and there is no shift hand-over</p> <p>When on leave or sick things are left till your return Come back from sick leave early</p> <p>Aware move to child care would be a higher salary but would have to start at the bottom, little movement in the job market likes the values of work in learning disability</p> <p>Training is a breadth not a depth</p>	<p>of work But feels more confident in the role of social worker using theory more in her thinking</p> <p>Discretionary mental health days</p> <p>Supportive team and team working</p> <p>Intensive 17 week induction</p> <p>Feeling of starting again</p> <p>Shared responsibility for case work</p>		<p>Job better than she expected.</p>	<p>Balance otherwise will burn out</p> <p>Changes in work patterns to be more flexible and include working at home make the pattern of work a bit more productive</p> <p>Lots more admin than he expected does about 5/6/ hours a week face to face the rest if notes follow up and driving</p>	<p>weeks</p> <p>Taking time to be with her family at weekends</p> <p>paperwork than she thought= 6 visits =2 days writing up</p> <p>Feels that finally she has</p>		<p>Biggest learning professionally is about accurate recording</p> <p>Professional standards</p> <p>View that there is a target driven agenda Munro doesn't appear to have changes the system</p> <p>Despite all did manage to do some therapeutic work</p> <p>Being professional;</p>
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Current learning is multi disciplinary/holistic	Idealised images of training v the battling in reality			Biggest personal learning –time management Learning that you can't save everyone and that you need to be clear about accountability	got her head around all the systems and different meetings		means doing extra hours to ensure records are accurate told to fudge things to come in on time scales
PQ training in a specialist area	Team support				Misses direct work with children		
Pleasure in the work comes from seeing cases through to a conclusion, knowing that a difference has been made	Computer system that flags the need for breaks			Team choice seems solid for him	Frustrations in the job often come from fellow professionals not doing their job		
	Work feels contained and managed			Performance targets set once a year	Personal learning is there is always something to learn		
	Centralised government agency				Job is physically and emotionally demanding		
Aware of the plight of others Guilty and sad for those who are at their wits end seeking employment	Biggest learning is about being a minority and experiencing racism						Aware of people who have been trying to get a job for 6 months 4 borough's and a unitary authority

**Table 4: Main Emotional Themes from first interviews**

<b>1P</b>	<b>1R</b>	<b>1S</b>	<b>1T</b>	<b>1W</b>	<b>1V</b>	<b>1N</b>	<b>1M</b>
Anxiety	Anxiety	Anxiety	Anxiety			Anxiety	
Disappointment	Disappointment		Disappointment	Disappointment	Disappointed		
Excitement	Excitement	Excitement					
Hope	Hope	Hope	Hope				
Frustration						Frustration	Frustration
Unknown	Not knowing	Unknown /Not knowing	Uncertainty				
	Shock	Shock		Shock			
	Fears	Fears					
Insecure	Insecure /Unsafe						
	Worry	Worry				Worries	
			Stress	Stressful			
Anger							Anger

	Euphoria	Feel good			Passionate	Enthusiastic	
	Relief	Relief					
	Resignation				Forgotten		Forgotten
			Panic		Isolated		
			Depressed		Pressure		
			Knocked confidence		Optimistic/ Positive		
					Realistic Apprehension		

**Table 5: Main emotional themes from second interviews**

2P Responsibility	2S	2T Responsibility	2W	2N	2M	2V	2R
Reflection		Reflection on work and life					
	Constant	Constant			Constant		
	Feeling looked after		Feels protected	Feel protected			
Support	support						Support
Pressure					Pressure	Continuous pressure	Pressured.
Surprised					Surprised		Surprised
Change				Change			
		Happy	Happy		Happy		
	Good	Enjoyment		Enjoying		Enjoys	
	Unhelpful	Concern	Stressful	Difficulties	Unsupported	Lack of support	Undermined unsupported.

Accountability       Recognition	Feels unclear	Lack of knowledge	Struggle  negotiation compromise  Idealism v. realism	Not knowing	Can't switch off	Can't switch off	Feels unsafe
	Shock	Self doubt		Challenges	Struggle	Overwhelmed	Overwhelming
	Feels confidence knocked	Frustration		Aware of his needs	Disappointed	"Rabbit in the headlights"	Disappointment
		Worry			Rivalry	"thrown to the lions"	Feels unseen/ unheard
	Lack of relationship	Disappointment			Manic		Tiring work
	Chaotic	Emotional baggage		Realistic	Chaotic	Frustration	Bitter
	Positive confidence higher	Loss			Unassertive	Feels alone	Awfulness
	Feeling like a social worker	Distress			Lack of self care	Pleased	Disempowered
		Blame and chastisement				Relentless	Concern
		Getting more confident				Stress of the unknown	Trapped
						Not wanted	Conflict
						Lack of self care	

**Table 6: Main emotional themes third interview**

3P	3S	3T	3W	3N	3M	3V	3R
Lots of change Disruption	change			Changes			
Confident	confident	Increased confidence	Confidence	Increased confidence	More in control and confidence increased		Confident
Pressurised,	Hectic			Hectic			Frantic
					Pressures		
	Support	Support		Feels supported			Feels more supported
		Stressful	Stressful				
Enjoying Pleasure			Proud		Enjoys her work Knows she is in a		

competent self				Calmed down	better place		
Knowing	starting again	Disappointing		Balance	Manager has been less than supportive		Unsupported and un safe
bombardment				you can't save everyone			
out of control,	Shared responsibility	Concern		Accountability	Expectations		Feeling undermined
Responsible	battling			Relief	Tied up in knots/Suffocating		
Huge challenges	feels contained and managed			Not burned out	Frustrations		
Pressure				Enjoyable	Physically and emotionally demanding		
, Guilt					Glad		
Sadness					Sad		
					needed reassurance		
					Feeling incompetent		
					Doubting		



## **Appendix IV**

Case studies R, V, N, M, P, S, T, W.

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## Case study R

This participant is working in an assessment team within children's services. She graduated with an MA in social work and was a sponsored student. As a sponsored student she knew that she would be returning to the service sector, in this case child care services. She believed that there would be some choice of job on her return.

"We had a sort of return to work interview, a written task and a face to face interview. And at the end of that they said what are your preferences? that was tricky because I didn't know what my preferences would be I just tried to weight up which team pro' and cons" R.1.45

"I wanted fostering and adoption, easy ride, really not wanting to be thrown in at the deep end really fostering and adoption first choice, family support second choice." R.1.52

However what transpired was that R was given a place in an assessment team in an area where she had some prior knowledge from a previous profession.

"We were then told you got this team initially pretty horrified and I thought Oh God" R.1.63

"resigned myself to front line child protection what were the gains I could bring out of this that would be positive. Frontline child protection is a great stepping stone to anything, said just do it" R.1.73

"a year or 2 frontline won't look bad on my CV looking on it as a third placement really" R.1.65

"It is going to be a very intense, yeah very challenging" R.1.78

This particular work placement was made more difficult for R as she had not had any statutory child care experience in either of her training placements.

"First placement was in adult health voluntary sector, not working alongside any social workers, and very much not a social work role so I really had to keep sort of going that I was a social worker not a mental health worker, how my perspective would be as a social workers. Second placement not statutory either which I was furious about working in child and adolescent mental health so I was furious that it wasn't statutory and they weren't going to place me anything else. Although there were social workers they were not practicing as social workers, they were CAMS workers" R.1.179

"They are doing some social work in supporting children but they are not doing any of the paper work or any of the process side as a social workers would do so I feel unequipped as I haven't worked alongside social worker's as in a role of social worker" R.1.184

"I don't think of it as a wasted placement but it is unfortunate that I didn't get the scope of experience that I would have got in a statutory setting" R.1.197

"I have experience of home visits from being an EWO but if I hadn't would be almost doing my first home visit as a qualified social worker" R.1.217

This inexperience was causing anxiety before the job began because R feels that she is walking into unknown territory not even knowing what she does not know

"I feel I'm going in a bit wet behind the ears to some extent because I haven't been working to deadlines like you would I have quite a bit of experience of child protection conference but there are things that I don't know that I don't even know that I don't know that will come up" R.1.203

R was clear that there had been many teams that had few permanent workers but many agency staff. She knew this from her student colleagues who were in child care teams in this child care department.

"I'm concerned about the mood, a lot of the teams have poor morale, lots of agency workers, lots of transitional changes. I was concerned, is this going to be one of those teams with a temporary team manager, so I was pleased when I met the team and the team manager appeared very supportive". R.1.78

R had had an introduction to the team and the team manager who would be her supervisor. This person had told her that there would be an induction programme.

"Yeah, when I went in I met the team manager who seems very approachable down to earth, good sense of humour, good vibe.. it seemed to be positive and supportive, good interaction between team" R.1.96

"She just said that there will be an induction that made me smile to myself because an induction can be very good or can be crap" R.1.117

"she said I would do the protocol training computer training so they're not sure how induction will look or when they will assign cases to me I hope that I won't get section 47 cases initially but I know people do initially, I shouldn't do but I know people do, I guess that I will have to roll with what I got "R.1.122

R was a seasoned professional from two previous established posts in the educational field and had clear expectations of what would be a good induction for her and one which would set her up best for her new post.

"for me a good induction would be to be able to shadow people, go out and time to meet services that you will be working alongside, you know networking" R.1.118

R had a realistic understanding that this type of child care team would have a high workload and as such she needed to use her induction time wisely

“cos once you are working there is no time to network once you are in the job”  
R.1.121

There was a discussion of supervision at this first meeting which was not as satisfactory as she had wished.

“I asked about supervision which is again quite important to me and again it was quite an interesting response yeah we all support each other but nothing quite tangible” R.1.127

This was balanced by a member of the team saying that the manager had an open door policy.

“that’s helpful but it’s different it’s also helpful to have allotted time and know that it is your time to explore something talk to someone because that is about case decisions not about all the reflective stuff. So that will be interesting to what form supervision takes how regular see how ring fenced I get the impression that it is not ring fenced it is I guess that not ring fenced so I will have to see. My dilemma will be having to digging my heels in and say that I need it to be otherwise. I think it’s unsafe” R.1.131

In placement R had had good reflective supervision which she hoped would be part of her on-going supervision within the assessment team.

“I had supervision where they were looking beyond the case decisions what your value bases and what your feelings might be about a family or a person and what that might say how that can impact on the decisions that you made it useful and powerful and impossible to do alone.....It is hard to challenge this alone you need someone to challenge and pick at those and say ok perhaps I am avoiding that person what irritations are they bringing out in me, what type of transferences have there been.” R.1.248

“when you are embroiled in the decisions and the casework the time frame and the work load it is important to take time take stock and reflect” R.1.258

“Ummm so it is more than that just case direction if it is good, and to be really useful it is that but it moves you along professionally, more than just mechanical, it moves you along a bit more in depth professionally, exploration of yourself, the family, the chronology not just individual stand-alone decision about the whole sweep of the work”R.1.277

R was concerned that in the new team there was not a culture of regular supervision and felt that she needed supervision and that it was an important part of her professional work. The lack of structure made her wonder if she would have to be assertive to get the supervision space that she felt was an important aspect of her professional work and her development as a practitioner.

“my dilemma will be to be assertive about what I think to be important”  
R.1.300

“at the end of the day I am responsible for my well-being and my professional practice and that is an important element of it.” R.1.311

There was no discussion about the NQSW programme but R made the assumption that she would be included as the authority had already invested heavily in her training. Her own understanding of the programme was that there would be protected time for supervision and case-loads were protected.

“That is the other thing that I have some anxiety about maybe that’s too strong but it is coloured by what I hear that NQSW should get above this number but in practice I know this doesn’t happen.” R.1.329

“I think it is hit and miss from the people that I spoke to it seems more likely that I will be given cases of complexity and a higher number of cases and not have supervision as ring fenced as it should be .” R.1.347

“as a new person in a new team wanting to please there is a power in balance I’m new I am inexperienced disadvantaged will I want to put my head above the parapet I can take this that or the other, I am aware of wanting to please I hope that the team manager will acknowledge this ,I don’t want to have to stand my ground but I fear that I will probably will” R.1.338

Many of R’s views do not come from personal experience but from anecdotal material from other people. As someone with no experience in frontline statutory social work this is all she has to build on.

“I think it is hit and miss, from the people that I spoke to it seems more likely that I will be given cases of complexity and a higher number of cases and not have supervision as ring fenced as it should be” R.1.347

“Want to draw those lines but it is easy before I start to say this but that can get quite blurred when you’re in a new team and wanting to please it might be very different not wanting to be shirking responsibility or being pedantic.”R.1.359

“I am aware that I am on a big learning curve this year...Yes I think so maybe if I had been in a statutory team it would feel less but it is a new team, a new area takes time to get your head around” R.1.368

R had begun doing her homework about her new catchment area which showed both commitment and anxiety. This interview was in July and she did not have a start date until September. There was a distinct sense that this participant needed the space between university ending and her new job to re-charge her batteries.

“Yeah recharging having a chance to get to read through the set procedures get a bit of preparation done have a little Google about services in the area not flying by the seat of my pants I want to go in feeling excited I would have been resentful going in July” R.1.429

“Don’t forget in this last year you know we haven’t had weekends off writing essays and things” R.1.433

“I know it is high intensity in this team and I need to run be running on all four batteries, chilled I needed to clear the decks for the first year head clear 100% ready for the first year, flying by the seat of your pants in a full on year” R.1.455

R would take the summer to re-charge and look after herself and was keen that she would be able to continue to do so. She saw that there were formal parts to this in the workplace, for example supervision and protected caseload. Outside the work place she felt that she had a supportive husband. Alongside that she was aware of the importance of managing her time specifically in the area of booking appointments and how easy it is to over commit in this area.

“over book the diary cram too much in that will mean that there is no time between visits or to write notes because this all adds to your stress you then when you write up you know there was something else “ R.1.470

“I can look after other people if I don’t look after myself and acknowledge my insecurities then my ignorance and inexperience and flag that up to others otherwise they won’t know that’s how I am feeling” R.1.487

The aspect of diary cramming she feels is a major problem if she does not watch it and ensure that she does not over commit herself particularly in a new geographical area where journey times will be unknown to her.

Alongside this is the work environment itself. One benefit is a car parking place, albeit a work away from where her desk is located. A negative is that the office is a hot desk environment this participant finds difficult. She is someone who works best when she has her familiar objects around her and knows that all the stationary, for example, she needs is on hand.

R was clear throughout the interview that she had concerns about her readiness to practice in the team that she had been allocated and drew an analogy to her time as a teacher.

“I think there are I used to be a teacher. Parallels between teaching and social work, fly by the seat of the pants training, anticipation and feeling you are pretending to be a teacher. I remember that as a teacher in the classroom, just pretending” R.1.549

“Well I knew that I had sold my soul and would need to do 2 years stint sold my soul for 2 years, ultimately I can go into anything ....after that I am free

But I don't feel the course has it prepared me or is it just nerves I don't feel like I know everything I need to know going in and practicing I suppose that is the whole point of not getting the complex cases nobody else no other professional will know, because you are qualified, they all think that you qualified and there is a bit of a danger there as you might not match what they think in your confidence and skill" R.1.575

This participant was next interviewed having been in post for six months. The whole tone of R's experience is summed up in her opening comments.

"It has been quite a little journey really, I feel that most of the time I am just marking time till I can get out it is awful really 6 months on. I really love the work but the volume and pace I just feel that I am spinning plates all the time I don't have thinking time reflection time and I am being pressed to a less than good enough job, and I'm surprised about how disempowered I feel.. I kinda of knew all of that before I came but I thought I won't work late, I won't work weekends, but I do it is a mixture of feeling too tired to kick against the system and not actually not feeling confident enough to challenge my manager I am disappointed with myself as I am quite a feisty lady, I don't have enough gumption to advocate for myself." R.2.5

The weight of the responsibility of the work and the pace laid heavily in the room. The team had lost workers who had not been replaced carrying 1.5 vacancies. The caseload is not too high but it contains complexity and risk.

"quite a few little babies and the complexity so you need thinking and reflection time for that need to be able to do things properly not just racing between one thing and another I feel so tired sometimes I take work home to do because it helps my sanity and I feel a bit bitter about that" R.2.25

Work is not contained into working hours and so work is taken home to ensure that timescales are met. The pace and volume are both great.

"the long and short of it's easier to do that than to have your manager saying that you have to do this core assessment I just take it home and do it"

The complexity of the work is acknowledged through regular supervision.

"Well...supervision I am tending to get that pretty regular because they are quite complex cases we tend to spend all morning on case management so you never get to the reflection bit or anything beyond so that is difficult at times " R.2.47

"I can off load at home. I have had one case that has been a real headache, I really feel that I have not been listened to and I am a bit annoyed about that but I am almost too tired, you know ,to challenge anything." R.2.53

The NQSW has been available to her and the specialist supervisor has been used on several occasions and found to be helpful and supportive. The work load is experienced as high and heavy and R feels that she cannot take time

off for training but will be going to book in time over the next six months. There is a heavy feeling which R agrees is how it feels.

“it is it is tiring work. I can see why people don’t want to work in in this team nice team of people nice manager but you are dealing with risk that level of risk all the time, coupled with volume and pace of work, feels bloody unsafe. One or the other is fine but the risk stuff is very interesting. I find the work fascinating but when you don’t have the time going into work thinking right I have got get there and phone a 100 things going on no thinking time feels unsatisfactory.” R.2.66

The first few weeks in the job did allow for a gentle entrance and time to become familiar with the location. This then was lost as the cases arrived vividly described.

“then the cases came boom, boom, boom, just like that so quite quickly I was up and running” R.2.85

Her case load has been protected to 17 but the manager is saying this will only be till the NQSW period is over.

“the manager has already said it will it was up to 17 or more she said once you get through the NQSW all bets off” R.2.89

In the context of the team to which she is attached other workers are carrying caseloads of up to 37. R is clear that this is an horrific prospect and not good practice.

“They are carrying 27, 37 cases that is horrific, it is horrific yeah I don’t think that it is good practice to carry that many cases” R.2.94.

This prospect and her professional view that this is not good practice led R to decide that she would leave the team as soon as possible. She would complete her year in the team but look for another post in the local authority after she had done 9 months to ensure she would move at the end of her NQSW year.

“I have really questioned if I wanted to stay in the local authority and I would really question if I would I would pay back my secondment to buy myself out of it, which is awful, I am really surprised” R.2.102

“it is very frustrating because I am not sure if my sense of being overwhelmed is just, just because I am new or whether it is just the job and I was naïve to believe that I could do it differently” R.2.109

R began to question if this was just her and did ask other NQSW in assessment teams how they felt and it seems to be a general feeling of being overwhelmed. Being a mature person R had clear feelings that the type of work at the pace and stress could affect her health.



“at the back of my mind is what is it going to do to my health to work at this level, it is not worth it.” R.2.117

R did not become a social worker with the idea of progressing a career, she has no aspirations of doing anything other than basic social work and possibly developing a specialism over time. Therefore the idea of staying in this team was unappealing.

“the thought of doing this day in day out....”R.2.121

R does enjoy the work, it is the constant chase to keep up that has taken its toll.

“At the moment I find the drive home quite therapeutic my phew time...this isn't the area I wanted to work in or the team I wanted to work in but I do like the work ,certainly like the work, but not at this volume” R.2.135

R paints a picture of herself as someone who use to be quite feisty but who now cannot advocate for herself. She appears unable to draw a line particularly in relation to taking cases and stick to it. The manger appears to agree case numbers with here and then not stick to that.

“When I have said to my manager when I have had a load of cases back to back and I have said to my manager can you give me I think I was up to about 16 or so, I said you can't give me any more till I get to grips with these she said ok and then a few days later just take these 2 and then just take these 2 and I was too weary to say anything ..I just run out of steam even to do that and that made me feel kinda trapped I think” R.2.145

Within her first 4 months of practice a complaint was made by a client. R felt that within the organisation she was not supported and the decision made was that the case be re-allocated. This was a bruising encounter and undermining of her confidence, particularly when the case was re-allocated to a newly qualified worker.

“My manager said don't worry we all get complaints and he had no complaint but I said that you have still taken me off the case.” R.2.241

Despite all of the issues outlined R does appear to have made good working relationships with other professionals in the field which she is pleased about. R is pleased with the standard of work she produces but is aware of the personal cost involved.

“If anything happens at home I just can't cope I haven't got anything left.” R.2.272

“I would come home and the lads come home and I didn't want to know what sort of day they have had I didn't care that was awful” R.2.277

“what I would do is come home do an hour or two on the laptop have bit to eat and fall asleep on the couch.”R.2.283

R was not prepared for the lack of time in the job. It is not just the paperwork but also inefficient systems and the lack of administrative support. One visit to follow up a referral can create 2-3 hours follow up work.

“I thought I’ll give this to business support to find out for me just make those calls I go over to them and bless them their jobs are being redefined ever week and they said we have to look at the manual to see if this is a piece of work we can do or you can e-mail so and so and ask him to allocate the piece of work” R.2.300

“time consuming and laborious paperwork tick box forms what I have found with cases that have been allocated to me it is time consuming because so many people before have just cut and paste and not really taken time to read it through and I think, hang on, that doesn’t make sense and unravelling takes time.” R.2.326

R is on the NQSW programme but although the tasks to be completed are not onerous there is no time to prepare for the sessions offered.

“It is 2 assignments and a portfolio but none of us have really looked into it it is always 6 o’clock the night before when we are all still here that we say oh my god did we need to have done something for tomorrow. We turned up for one session there are about 11 of us and they asked have you read these bits for today and only one person had so we all seem to be in about the same boat.”R.2.334.

R finds that there is a conflict between her professional integrity and the Ofsted targets and management pressure given the workload that she has.

“what you are doing is trying to sing to 2 masters. You have the local authority that has its targets, its Ofsted inspection, and then you have your professional accountability. You could lose your job but you wouldn’t want to lose your profession, often they are in conflict with each other.”R.2.348

“If I miss the timescale for the core assessment no-one is at harm from that and actually if you are not meeting the core assessment timescale that is sending a message that the timescale is unrealistic that is an important message but my manager kept going on about the core assessment timescale and in the end I did it at a weekend and it 6=7 hours I could not find in the normal working week.”R.2.356

“the professional codes, the service user and the work you do for them is at the heart of what you do. Yes it is important to have a core assessment as it gives someone a one document picture of what is going on, but your real accountability is to the service you provide.” R.2.363

Most difficult of all is the fact that she is asked to fudge issues.

“the manager said can’t you just fudge it from the child protection report that you wrote because that was a really fantastic report I can’t just cut and paste from that report I need time to do it properly. I don’t want to just fudge it. Maybe that is the only way to survive” R.2.367

“My manager says you have only got 16 cases you can have up to 18, others have more next year you will have more so you have got to learn to do this somehow. R.2.389

“So I am left with the choice of whether I sign up to this long term and I don’t want to sign up to it, social work yes, but not the volume. When you are dealing with complexity and you have time to think reflect and plan that is very interesting but when you are dealing with complexity and risk and you are flying by the seat of your pants that is horrible. Then you think if the phone goes at the weekend what is that or you think if something comes on on the news. It hasn’t all been like that but there have been times when overwhelmingly I am flying by the set of my pants. I can’t work like this this is not safe. Didn’t feel safe for me, that is how you make mistakes, forget things, when you are charging from pillar to post.” R.2.405

Overall the first 6 months were described as bruised and battered by the journey. There were some highlights and R was supported by regular supervision. This was predominantly technical; ways of doing things with no thinking planning or reflection time, everything being done in haste and on the run. Overwhelmingly there is a sense of things being always on the edge.

The final interview takes place at the end of R’s first year. This interview takes place at a different location as R has just transferred teams from assessment to fostering. R had been seriously unhappy in her other post and decided that she would move on. This decision was taken having discussed her feelings with her NQSW supervisor.

“Understaffed, not feeling supported, not feeling safe. I don’t think any of us felt that our manager held our back so we ended up case noting discussions. We couldn’t trust that she would back you that is awful, I remember saying to her I am going to case-note this now.” R.3.233

On reflection R feels that her last experience was partly difficult as she had lost some respect for her manager as had other members of the team. The team were supportive of each other but there was a rift between the workers and the manager which led to R feeling unsafe and unsupported.

“I remember thinking quite a lot that if I can get to the end of the year with them –the children all safe, I have achieved a lot, and it felt more and more like spinning plates...I did learn a lot ... gosh it has been quite a year” R.3.57

“there never was very much ring-fencing. I was up to 21 cases half of which were CP so there never was much ring-fencing” R.3.83

R feels that from about seven months into the job her confidence grew. However this also coincided with making the decision to leave the assessment team and this experience of knowing that there was an end in sight did have a terrific difference on her experience. Once she had found a new post the last three months in assessment were marked by a decreasing caseload and more time to offer direct work therapeutically to children.

"In generic social work terms I feel quite confident about the processes and my role and about procedures and protocols and home visiting and going to meetings" R.3.104

"I think it was at about 6 months I do think that I was strong and competent at 6 months I don't think that that there was heaps of change from 6 – 12 months there was heaps of change from 0-6 months." R.3.133

The new post offer new challenges particularly as it is in the specialist realm of fostering and children with disability.

"but it is a whole other learning curve. The team are really lovely and I feel more confident about the calmness and wisdom and dare I say the honesty of the manager" R.3.17

The NQSW programme is now complete and R feels that it did not offer all that was promised.

"I think that it was a bit of a joke quite frankly. I would chip along to the sessions when we first started I remember J saying to us I am here to champion you, you will have your ring fenced hours I have never gone back to here to say they haven't been ring fenced and I know people that have and nothing has happened and I know J has to work alongside these managers long after the NQSW have gone, but it does make a bit of a mockery of ummm we have a couple of (named university) teaching days they have been a bit dull they could have just sent the PowerPoint " R.3.140

The portfolio has been completed and there are some written assessments to be finished.

"Again it is a bit of a game I wonder if it has served the tick box purpose of the uni rather than the social worker... I wonder if we could have had 1 or 2 observations of practice and that might have been just as telling of where we were it might not as been as comfortable as sitting at home doing this." R.3.159

Alongside this training all other county training has been open to her and offers a mixture of skills training and procedures and process training.

R gave a view of her supervision being focused on the technical decision making of cases and that it was limited to this even though sometimes it took 2-3 hours to consider all her cases in turn. Supervision was not a place of growth or as comprehensive as her placement experience. In the new team

she has not as yet had supervision but understands that the supervisor is using a systemic approach to staff and case supervision.

“in my last team it was sat in the middle of the office next to my manager at her desk and she would take personal calls usually one or 2, mainly from her children. I thought bugger this but didn’t say anything, but did then start to book a room so we were in a private space which was better, but it was never more than case management, so what have you done what are you going to do go and do it and we took 2-3 hours just going through the cases looking at complex case decisions, so I don’t think I grew through supervision..” R.3.204

R felt that the organisation was big and unwieldy and this was apparent in the way that social workers are treated.

“You are absolutely not valued and expected to bust a gut all the time just for your profession.”R.3. R.3.256

“ in this organisation because of its size and the way they govern and manage people, you don’t matter and they do send many things that are stupid like the newsletter every week which is written by someone in a room to send to people who are too busy to read it and you just think that is (name of newsletter) it is just bloody daft no time to look at them. I use to just file them, I now just delete them. There are examples like room booking you have to log into a system and then get an email very frustrating you just can’t ring a number. Who are these things serving? just bureaucracy not serving the service users as we have less time for them very frustrating working for a big organisation it is so large and clunky” R.3.269

The individual is lost sight of and this is also what happens in the target driven culture the purpose of work is lost with regard to meeting deadlines and targets. This does not fit or sit with professional integrity.

“I don’t think it would change I was told to fudge core assessments to meet the time scale and I just couldn’t because we have lost the point then” R.3.311

“If you break a standard that no one knew about you wouldn’t get a hard time like you do if you meet a target “R.3.324

“You can get sacked for missing a time frame but you can get struck off for not following the code. That is right, it is It is more important. There is more to targets and timeframes than the business goal and there are reasons behind them, but if you fudge something to meet a target you have totally convoluted the point of it. So this comes from this top down focus on maybe not so much so from Munro but traditionally this top down target driven agenda and has lost sight of this being a social work practice agenda.” R.3. 336

Asked about the biggest learning over her first year both professionally and personally R gave the following insights.

“attention to detail throw away detail at your risk.” R.3.282

“Personally work life balance around six months I was doing so many hours I was thinking what is the point. Something, I am learning is about boundaries.”  
R.3.289

In exploring this further in the context of the previous team and her professional integrity there may not be much shift in how she worked or the hours she would need to put in alongside standing up against the target driven culture.

“If I got those caseloads again I don’t know I would be doing, anything differently because I felt that I needed to that things had been done cos if something happens they lock all the cases down and I always wanted to feel that it was important that the system needed to be up to date.”R3. 300

Asked to come up with a phrase or image for the year R quickly responded

“Frantic because of the team and location “R.3.277

## Case study V

This participant was a sponsored student from child care services and returned to a front-line children services post.

“Well before I joined up I knew that was where I was heading as I am sponsored by (named county council) and I knew in the back of my mind I knew that is where most workers are needed, and when I signed on the dotted line I knew I would be working for 2 years after I qualified, so I knew where I was headed, so going into front line child protection I am a bit apprehensive but I worked in youth justice before a bit more specialised, it will be a steep learning curve, and every social worker I talk to says it will be a good grounding” V.1.10

This sponsored student was given no choice of work and is to begin in a frontline team in September. She did make the three choices that she was asked to, knowing that going to a permanence team one of the three choices was very unlikely. All those who she knew to be sponsored ended up in assessment teams. Her request for her first choice of geographical location was given to her. There has been the briefest of meetings with the team manager and two potential supervisors.

“I met the 2 managers there are 2 senior practitioners who have a higher role just like this, X this is Y, and we were introduced to the team who waved but I haven’t sat down with people one to one as yet.” V.1.33

At this meeting it was made clear that the manager of the team did not want newly qualified workers in the team. These new staff would be replacing experienced agency staff who had been with the team for a long time.

“but the team that we are going into, assessment team, need to hit the floor running as we are replacing agency staff who have been in the team a long time. To be honest with you the managers initially didn’t want us as they don’t usually have newly qualified’ in that team. Quite funny we didn’t want them and they don’t want us a bit of a barrier to begin with but umm they did say that we would have more supervision quite friendly-open door policy, and to be honest I’m not sure what the setup is as it was only a brief meeting.” V.1.143

“it is going to be hard but I will be glad to get back to work” V.1.39

The placement experience of V was not in a statutory team. She worked in a hostel for homeless as a first placement and then in a family centre. She was going to an assessment team without any experience of that work area.

“I have never worked in an area. I did 2 days shadowing before doing the course, but I have worked with social workers but never in an area team, so that is a bit of apprehension.” V.1.49

“(homeless persons hostel) I had about 3 different managers in my 100 day placement I was expected just to get on with it..... the managers didn’t seem to like social workers and I think they were doing it for the money really  
“V.1.57

V felt that the saving grace of her first placement was her off-site practice teacher. Her second placement in a family centre gave her lots of experience of in depth assessment. V feels unprepared for the assessment team and had tried to get her placement changed so that she could have experience of a child protection team before being given a job in one.

“I do think that the people who are sponsored, who are going to be in child protection, that it would be a good idea to put us in those teams for our 100 day placement so we have the experience while protected as students before being thrown to the workplace. When I was given my placement I did mention that and she was quite rude to me saying that I should be grateful for what I had got.”V.1.71

V was told by the human resources team that she would be on the NQSW programme and that she would be contacted soon after she starts by the co-ordinator of that scheme.. the NQSW programme offers V some protection but she is not clear what this looks like. However what this protection means in terms of caseload is not clear. She should not hold section 47 cases (child protection investigations). She believes her caseload will be around 20 but has heard stories of caseloads much higher than that and of students who held section 47 cases.

“I spoke to one of the friends who was based as a student in (named town) he held section 47 as a student, so I don’t think that is going to apply to me in terms of numbers they do it based on children not cases and in my old job I was protected. You hear horror stories of 30-40 cases but realistically I should imagine around the 20 mark, it is learning to say no, depends on the ethos of the team” V.1.157

V understands from her contact with those who are in child protection teams that the work is full on and that long hours can be expected.

“Yeah I am quite grounded and I am just going to enjoy the summer as I know that they will claw back the hours off of me anyway. I know that there is TOIL (time-of-lieu) but I know that social workers go in on a Saturday and work late.” V.1.165

V appeared to have no illusions about the job. However, V did feel that she could make a difference to people’s lives.

“you can save children’s lives with it being the assessment team, I’m going to be in then out, I make the decision about how it goes and then pass on”  
V.1.186



“I’m passionate about the people when I pass it over what happens”V.1.194

V knows that she has difficulty drawing the line between work and home and by her own admission is a bit of a workaholic.

“I am a bit of a workaholic, it’s getting your personal drawing the line between work and home that is difficult in this job, it is always high pressure and I am aware I could burn out like in my old job. I would work late and always be doing but it is a case of only doing what needs to be done”V.1.200

“I need to know what it is I am expected to do.” V.1.215

“You can watch me slowly lose energy, but I am optimistic but not too optimistic but I think that I am going to want to do too much and that is what a lot of social workers have said, is that when you start this when you are fresh into social work you want to change the world, but you can still make a difference.” V.1.225

V did not have a clear strategy for helping herself to switch off and relied on her partner and friends to help her do that. V is explicit about the fact that in the last two years her focus has been on getting through the course. She has had little down time and that she will use the summer for this and begin to prepare for her new job in August.

Training to a more advanced level is on the agenda for V and is in fact one of the things she really likes about social work.

“one thing that I like about social work is that you keep learning. I know that I said I am out of the study bubble, at the moment I do like it and so you can do your masters, then do the NQSW programme, than advanced, I love training opportunities.V.1.268

With regards to the NQSW year V is full of hope and aware that she needs to be guided and nurtured.

“I will be interested to find out I think (named county council) are doing better for NQSW and protecting them but we will see. To be honest it is learning, constantly learning doesn’t make sense to drown you straight away. It is the most valuable time to become a practitioner I have not practiced as a social worker, so I need that nurture, that time, and I hope that I am and that I do sing their praises” V.1.326

“I am optimistic and realistic” V.1.321

Interview took place six months into V’s first year and took place in her work place.

“I knew it was busy and it is busy there is support but not as much as there should. The general rule is you come, in I’m usually there by 8.45am, get about a fifteen minute lunch break, I rarely get a full lunch break, and then you

are there for as bit afterwards s well and you are still chasing your tail. There are not enough hours in the week to get everything done and every week there is something different to do. You need a case study on every piece of work we are going to be audited to do this do that. (all said in a breathless way) always something extra that you need to do.” V.2.12

This pace of work was exacerbated by short staff and needing to be on duty which is the frontline of the frontline.

“on my third day I was put on duty. I’m in the assessment team so we are in the front line and I sat there like a rabbit in the headlights panicking I was so scared.” V.2.24

“but when I first started I think there was only 2 of us so so you get more cases. I try not to work at the weekends but you do have to otherwise you wouldn’t get it all done.” V.2.27

The NQSW gives an extra layer of support for V because of the group supervisions and monthly workshops. However there has not been a sufficient level of supervision to meet the terms set out in the newly qualified social workers scheme.

“that in terms of supervision, through my line manger as a newly qualified member of staff I should have been having it more than what I have it, more often than other members of staff.....however and I did have one, one supervision last week, which was my first this year so it is not guaranteed to be monthly. I did highlight before and I did say I needed it more regularly; it doesn’t always seem to be a priority for managers. Say that you book it for 9.30 am you might not get in there till 10, 10.30, and more often you get rescheduled most people expect to get rescheduled once or twice before you get supervision, so for me who likes to be quite organised I come in knowing that I have supervision and I have got half an hour but I can’t get on because I know at any minute she could come and say that she is ready for me now, but when I do have it it is useful ”V.1.47

Here V is clear that she needs more formal support and goes further to say that the stress is too great for her sometimes.

“I also find because I am not getting supervision that often that I am bottling up things and bursting into tears when I get there which is totally not me, it is not in my character.” V.2.59

V has also had contact with people in different teams in the county and is aware that the levels of protection for new workers vary a lot.

“one of my friends who is qualified is in a different area and you hear how everyone is treated different she is in (locality named) and she was allocated a mentor when she first arrived and was very protected, not going on lone visits but my friend who started on the same day here, we were just thrown to the lions I am not quite sure how the 10% less caseload works” V.2.67

The caseload for V is a problem as there always seems to be outstanding work and work to be done on core assessments and children in need cases. Pieces of work have different time scales so some work continues for several weeks alongside the regular pattern of being on duty every other week. V is also told that she does too much on the cases.

“from the early days I was told that I do too much with the families, you do too much but it is difficult to understand the role of assessment social worker that goes it doesn’t do any work with the family that is how it has been do the assessment and refer on look at risk to child protection level but like simple parenting strategies I was told other agencies should be doing that and if you look at relation based social work it it doesn’t make sense.” V.2.96

“you don’t get job satisfaction, in out, in out, like for an initial assessment, you’re expected to go out for one visit for 45-60 minutes in and out that is it in that time see the child, see the family, then do your checks, it is all about time, it is very managerial, very time scales, if you go out scales and you know that there are other things going on in the family but you haven’t got time to explore, you know what I mean”V.2.103

V feels that much of the time she is working alone. She finds the atmosphere in the building weird and experiences people as having cliques and being suspicious and mistrustful of people.

“We do do first visits joint visits unannounced visits so you have got another social worker there but a lot is down to you, you manage your own workload and you see other people put as little or as much as they want into this job but I think going back to the timescales that there is one person in our team who never goes out of time scale but I don’t think it shows that they are any better social worker than perhaps someone like me who has gone out sometimes and other people who have .”V.2.180

The work is ever present for V and she finds that it permeates her life outside work as she cannot stop herself thinking of what is happening in her cases.

“For me it is so (quavering voice) difficult to switch off, so for me you’ll go home and have cases whirling round in my head go to bed with cases whirling round, so learning to switch off has been most hard.”V.2.203

“It is that comes down to the fact of supervision as well because you don’t always get it, you have got colleagues there but everyone is so busy, when you ask people are so supportive and if someone has a meltdown in the office everyone is there, but just generally day to day some weeks are better than others, but it does follow you and it is difficult to switch off, that is what I have found, it is something that I need to work on as it is hard.”V.2.210

The Christmas break went OK for V and she did take some holiday after Christmas. However the run up to her holiday was filled with overtime so she

could go away with everything up to date. She also knew that when she returned she would be on duty.

“the week before my holiday I worked everyday till 7.30 to get it done because otherwise it is like my boyfriend, don’t worry about it, just leave it, does it really matter, but it would be still there when I got back and my first day back I was back on duty so if I hadn’t of done it I would have been under even more stress”. V.2.227

V is clear that assessment skills are really important along with communication skills. However she is aware that she needs to work on her time management skills as she is constantly doing and not planning as much as she would like.

“... I need to work on my time management skills I am always doing but don’t seem to get things done “V.2.277

“It would be good to plan things a bit more because the time is so limited literally one visit to the next not even a break to plan.” V.2.285

There is no time or space in the working day except for the monthly group supervision for the newly qualified workers to reflect.

“I don’t think anyone in that team has I don’t think until you are in a team like that you, you understand, I don’t know if you were in that type of team, it is just you don’t have time to stop like I said about the group supervision but that is only monthly” V.2.290

This lack of space to think about cases has had a detrimental effect on this worker as she feels the weight of the cases on her shoulders. She has asked for support of one of the senior practitioners as a mentor type figure. This happened on one occasion and then went by the wayside so she feels left.

“I wasn’t having supervision and everything was all down on my shoulders ,and I said to my manager could the duty senior’s just to go through what I am thinking of doing, a b c, and I did it once with J and then it all disappears nothing is ever set” V.2.303

The duty system is geared to experienced workers so introducing newly qualified workers is complicated as they should not be assessing child protection cases. This means that the newly qualified workers take most of the other work, leaving the experience practitioners free in case a child protection matter comes through.

“I think it is the unknown cos when I have seen all my families once I can run with it, so you get duty week, it is the anxiety cos you don’t know what is going to come in so, that is a bit stressful even if you have a good day and you only pick up one the next you could have 7 bits of paper on your desk and you think oh my god where do I start.” V.2.323

"And you are like doing assessment after assessment and I can see how people slip in to writing similar things and how the child is lost in assessment. I am a person who has to fill all the boxes, like my manager says, on an initial assessment you don't have to fill in everything, but I'm the sort of person who has to fill in all the boxes."V.2.329

V meets the other newly qualified workers and knows that all teams are not as busy or putting as much work onto the newly qualified workers. She finds it difficult to understand why she has been placed in the assessment team when it is clear that the team manager did not want such inexperienced staff.

"X would go in ( to the group supervision) and say oh my god this has gone to child protection and stressing about our caseload and they (2 other NQSW'ers ) in permanency teams had one case and we would just laughed, how very different they are and protected compared to the assessment team."V.2.345

"the managers and they basically told us they did not want us on the team... apparently we are too much effort or something, to be honest I don't know why they took us to be honest with you"V.2.354

The work is not suiting V and she has plans to move on but not until she has done her full year and then a bit more to get some experience of investigating child protection cases. There is a sense that she wants to go and work in a more therapeutic environment.

"I know it sounds as if I have moaned about it but everyday is different you do learn everyday, I like the having different things but it does get oh god what will I get, but I won't be in the assessment team for ever, I look at family support and the grass does not seem any greener the way that that works at the moment, I don't think I would enjoy it. I would love to work at the family centre" V.2.364

The aspect of looking after herself is not really happening; she is working at such a pace just to keep up and when she does book leave she works frantically before she goes to ensure that she is up to date and that there is nothing outstanding to come back to.

"the week before I was, was going to get my hair highlighted but I didn't cos as I said I had to work late, that never happened, it is things, this job easily sucks you in and like J the senior said, she was married before, it can take over your life, just be careful, that's the problem when you are a doer it just gets more."V.2.389

The constant re-doing of information also means that tasks seem to take a considerable amount of time.

"for example, the lady I saw today I mentioned a self-esteem group and she was interested so I need to do another referral for that it is piddly things like referral forms. I know that they have to be done but I repeat myself so much

on assessment forms and closures, you regurgitate information. I think it is pointless."V.2.401

The work for the portfolio has not been looked at by V at the six month point as it feels like another pressure.

"To be honest I haven't had time to look at them, I bet when you listen to the first one I was quite looking to doing my newly qualified, probably would if I had time."V.2.409

"Sorry, it is another pressure not an opportunity; I enjoyed my masters I really did."V.2.422

V is tearful at this point in the interview. She feels that she is constantly working from the time she gets to work and that her team meetings are always talking about targets and time scales.

"I can constantly work from just before 9, eat at my desk and then go to a team meeting to constantly be told to do more you're going to be audited and things like that." V.2.449

This feeling pervades her week and she would prefer to work late on a Friday rather than return to a pile of work on a Monday. She is trying to be a good worker but at personal cost.

"you want to be a good worker.... I would rather stay late and get it done Friday rather than have a load of things to do Monday." V.2.455

V came into social work thinking that she would be able to do more direct work than she does currently;

"The complete opposite ummm I don't think the role I am in at the moment is fulfilling no I take that back it can be as a doer you put more in and do more which stresses you out more, more for the families you come into this job to help families, I would like to do more work with families." V.2.537

Overall V feels that the system in which she is working is not working for her.

"Definitely not and I do enjoy parts of my job but it is a system" V.2.572.

This was the last interview with V who despite my attempts to contact her never replied to e-mails to make an appointment to meet with her at the end of her first year.

## Case study N

N graduated with a BA and was a self-funding student. He had found it hard to find a social work job. N has gained a post in a child care team and at the time of the first interview is awaiting clearance to start. Prior to training he had no experience excepting as a volunteer in a contact centre.

“even though I wanted children I didn’t restrict myself I applied for everything that I can, even looked at X county they had vacancies but only of internal applicants, Y county in Z town and A (London borough) and ummm B(unitary authority) as they are a unitary separate from Y and W.” N.1.211

“I had first application to X (county council) in the beginning of February then I applied for a few all the way through, actually sort of found stuff but got responses back thanks and no thanks, I was apparently in the talent pool but nothing was coming from that and the interviews were from specific positions I got 3 interviews for x and 1 for Y”N.1.228

N found this lack of posts depressing as he felt that he had committed 3 years to a vocational training.

“it is vocational training for a particular job not like a business degree” N.1.258

N did not have a statutory placement in children’s services his child care placement was working with homeless young people 16-21 with a housing association. His second statutory placement was in mental health.

This job was allocated through an interview pool so N has had no direct contact with the team. N is really pleased with this opportunity; he has changed career leaving a secure job to follow his interest in social work and is fully supported by his parents and his partner.

“I have always wanted to do children and families and it is with looking after children so that is a bonus and it is reasonably local so good for commuting not get up at five kinda thing or any of that. As for experience I didn’t have a children and families placement with younger children as such from the course my placement was with 16 -21 year olds” N.1.17

“I am aware that I will be facing things that are emotionally challenging and that I will be thinking on my feet and things like that emotionally I will harden up a bit but get over that, get used to it, you get your tool box out and there will be times when I go through the same emotional response all the time. My family and partner are fully supportive and there will be colleagues around who have all been through it”N.1.94

N knows that he is on a steep learning curve and that the course was a preparation for what he needs to learn now. It was a starting point not an end point.

“at the beginning of the course some of us thought this is going to teach us how to be a social worker but it is not. Yes it does, it prepares you to start as a social worker there is then lots to learn from then on. I sometimes think that I am going to go there and think I should know, this I should know that, I know there are local policies and procedures that I will have to learn and all the legislation and theories fit with how they do that in the locality.” N.1.104

N is realistic that there will not be as much time for reflection as he had as a student but is aware that he will need and should be offered regular and frequent supervision.

“Supervision every 2 weeks at the beginning, moving to once a month a lot can happen in 2 weeks so I am hoping there will be a senior practitioner or manager available for ad hoc things but appreciate the pressures on the team and things like that.” N.1.150

In thinking about the work and the skills he is likely to use, N thinks that communication and time management will be really important.

The gap between finishing the taught training and beginning work is an anxiety for N.

“I am worried in my head that I am going to start forgetting things as our last actual taught session was Easter (this interview in October). I was in an interview and suddenly I remembered frozen watchfulness so I put it in and I realised the stuff is still there. When you are in that environment you are thinking in that way so my biggest worry is that I am leaking out knowledge, that I have learned, slowly forget.” N.1.180

N is enthusiastic and grounded about what is to come he is proud of his achievement and keen to get on with the job that he has trained for.

The second interview took place six months into the job.

N had had a gradual start into the profession with a team manager who was aware of his lack of statutory experience.

“the first few months, pretty well. I had a very small case load of 2 that is pretty well unheard of because the team manager at the time recognised that I had not had any statutory experience so used the opportunity to get use to it, have a couple of cases there, get use to the processes and use the time to shadow other team members and look at services.” N.2.6

Although he felt protected there were also major changes after about 3 months.

“we have changed our name and are on our third manager in 6 months, we are getting it used to it umm” N.2.17



By this time he also has a caseload of 12 which is seen as a protected caseload.

“Experienced members of the team, you are looking at 16,18 depends on complexity they are more likely to get the ones that are going through the courts and I am less likely to do that. Saying that, I do have one or 2, but with help from the senior practitioners with the law and that.”N.2.26

N is aware of the different pressures in the different child care teams.

“speaking to a couple of the others in assessment teams they have caseloads that are double, really double, with a quick turnover like 8 core assessments and I have got 2 and they are not as like urgent so I am glad that I’m in this end so I can work long-term with young people cos I think if I had been in an assessment team then I might be saying that I can’t handle this. There seems to be a lot of pressure.” N.2.30

The team that N is a member of has had a number of changes of manager within his first year. He has had 3 supervisors who have all had a different approach to supervision so his supervision has not been consistent. Currently it is consistent.

“Fortnightly until I have done 6 months or is it a year? Can’t remember, then monthly, and it that time we sometimes only talk about 2 cases, go into really, go into depth”.N.2.65

All in all he feels he has had a good introduction to child care social work.

“I think that you are right, it has been as gentle an introduction as it can be. From some of the stories that you here about here you are chuckled, in here’s your caseload, I’m glad that hasn’t been the case.”N.2.92

“I remember when I last saw you, I thought in October, I thought I would be doing me visits and I think it is all the background things that goes on between the visits that I did not have a grasp on because I had no statutory children’s experience”N.2.98

The biggest learning for N has been the pace of change.

“with children’s there are a lot more stakeholders and you have to remember to keep everyone informed off what is going on and trying to keep my head round the local policies and procedures as well, a week in and our team name is changing, year alright, and things like that, our values have now changed for X county council and it has been like that. I had heard that things are always changing and things like that the biggest thing is learning.” N.2.103

N has been pleasantly surprised by the support in the work place.

"I think the support aspect to be honest because without that I would not have enjoyed it as much or understood as much."N.2.117

N has had some communication issues with the legal department and can see how serious case reports always talk about communication issues between professionals.

"I think sometimes the communication and I know it has been a factor in all serious case reviews that someone did not communicate to someone and I'm finding that how you might interpret something not how they meant it that is a challenge."N.2.139

He also comes across young people who do not want to connect with a social worker as they have had too many to trust that he will be there for more than a few weeks.

N feels that communication is his most important skill.

"Definitely communication and on different levels as well. On my caseload birth to 16 years old, then you have, children with development delay and parents with low IQ"N.2.194

Time management is crucial in order to meet the deadlines for assessments.

Training opportunities are always there and N has taken advantage of these alongside the newly qualified social work programme.

"Yes we have a newly qualified programme in our first year with a supervisor who comes round and we have workshops every couple of months at the records office and there are work books with articles and assignments and a portfolio, to do and speakers in like the family group conference, and you think year I might have people who could benefit from this intervention so it is handy. Or like external to X (council) and we also have the NQSW supervision every few months the group up at S (place of work)will sit down and have a chat have a think about an issues"N.2.236

The newly qualified programme can build towards an advanced award and this participant will follow that path.

Reflective practice has a place in his work both formally in supervision and informally either on his own or in consultation with colleagues.

"Definitely, I use the time in the car going to and from, what did they say last time, remembering to ask them about things, how things have gone, recent contact, coming back to the office using that time to reflect and in quieter times in the office turning to a colleague and asking just on this particular bit have you got someone on your caseload who is getting trouble at school absconding out all hours what did you do ? I know each case is different but it is like getting ideas, they say e-mail you this link about this resource."N.2.325

N says that he factors in time for administration of his cases and as he writes up the notes he is reflecting on his work. He has placements outside his local area that give him a long drive to reflect on that case.

N has been looking after himself by ensuring a good work life balance and that his leisure activities get him out in the air and countryside; he likes jogging and bike rides.

98% of the time N can guarantee to do no overtime. He knows that some of his long journeys to visit placements mean that he sometimes finishes late but this is balanced by time-off-in-lieu. Rarely will duty have him working late and this is only if an unexpected placement needs to be made.

"I'm glad my expectations, some of the horror stories that I heard from some of my colleagues, haven't materialised, which I am glad about umm yes there are pressures because of the time, pressures like you think 35 days that is 7 weeks but that is not a lot 7 weeks goes like that, it's as long as I keep, on top of the admin, makes my job a lot easier.N.2.399

"because I did not have a statutory children's placement and obviously when you are on placement from uni the caseloads are a lot less anyway so I didn't have anything to base it on. I am glad the doom and gloom that I heard over the 3 years at uni haven't come to fruition"N.2.415

"there were certain things that I was aware of you know I have chosen this career there will be bits to all jobs that we don't like but 6 months in comparing to previous jobs I have had, the job satisfaction is higher"N.2.423

"you are not expected to have everything up here (touches head) but you are expected to know where to go to get that information and it comes back to like one of the lectures said, it is like having a tool box and certain tools are for certain jobs and sometimes you are not going to have every tool there but you might have the card of someone who does have that special tool"N.2.431

"I am not perfect and can't save everyone and if I'm honest about things and as hard as it might be to know that I am going to get a bit of a bollocking as you give him a report for court which has got to be there at the end of play at 3 pm so he is having to read under pressure but you are going to learn"N.2.451

"Beforehand I was thinking how much I was enjoying it and had so much to learn and I have realised you can't save everyone and that helps because if I didn't know that I would get despondent that helps"N.2.458

N shared how his confidence has grown and that at the end of six months he feels like a social worker

"I did have newly qualified on my e-mail address and my line manager said what is all that rubbish, you are a social worker, I thought that people respond kindly to me, he said it might have the opposite response, it was like a comfort

yeah, but I took it off and I did feel more confident yes I am a social worker.”N.2.508

The third interview took place just after the end of his first year. N remains in the same team. He has had a number of changes within the first year.

“first one got promoted to service manager, then we had an agency that didn’t last long and now we have another agency but they seem to be staying.” N.3.11

Over the year N has grown in confidence and feels that this shows in the way that he deals with calls that are made to the office from foster carers about those they are caring for.

“I recognise now that I have a bit more confidence and knowledge and feeling a bit more comfortable, as before I might have thought that I have got to do something when it is not my remit to be doing anything. So if a kid is coming back late all the time, I can get him to look at it but I can’t stop him, just get him to look how this affects other people I can’t be with him 24 hours a day.” N.3.21

“Yeah yeah, going from thinking that someone has rung and told me something so I must go and do something to saying thank-you, I’ll make a note of that. That comes with experience.” N.3.29

N has been surprised at how apolitical the workplace is and how hard decisions are taken if families do not make progress in caring for their children.

“It is a bit different to what I thought it would be I thought it would be more political” N.3.36

“I’m surprised because all my friends said that you’ll get your rose tinted glasses on- quite aligned to left wing politics - but to be honest it is not like that it is a bit harsh if anything if they are doing that then tough, there is not that sort of how can we accommodate, it is tough if you haven’t met those things that we have asked you to do parents that is it you have had your chance.” N.3.39

N had thoughts and expectations of the role before he began but he has been surprised by how different it is in respect to the balance of direct contact time and the amount of administration there is.

“I remember sitting here saying that just before I started, just going out doing visits and things it will be nothing, I have learned it is more than that, I did think that there would be admin but the time spent in front of the computer doing forms and making notes and phone calls, I might get if I am lucky in a good week an hour or so a day with children if I try to do a visit a day so 5-6 hours with the children out of 37 hours a week have to include driving to and from places. I understand and the accountability it is not proportional... but

how else, cos you can't have other typing your notes for you cos they might be coming to the case in the same way." N.3.205

N describes his progress over the year as a gentle line upwards, a progressive path with some hectic and hairy moments.

"Hectic at times then quiet times, a few lulls into a false sense of security" N.3.5

"Umm I have had some hairy moments, not really giving myself time to write a court statement and things like that." N.3.73

N is clear that during his first year he has tried to keep a boundary and balance between work and home.

"No I do try and keep the boundary between work and home and there are some occasions when you have to stay late or go out and move someone but they are few and far between and I have actually worked out that managing these sort of situations is much better than letting things bumble along and then having to fire fight. So some colleagues say that they are taking the laptop home over the weekend and you get e-mails from people at 10pm on a Sunday, I am not going to do that I know it is not a 9-5 job but..." N.3.87

"I have got to have some sort of balance otherwise I will burn out" N.3.97

One of his biggest learnings has been to manage his time.

"Let's think personally like the time management thing, because as I mentioned earlier, the judge statement, I was worrying about things more than I needed to. So it wasn't so bad. Professionally I think alluded to before, just learning that I can't do everything, save everyone. You have to can't do anything about it as long as I have done as much as I can." N.3.244

N is aware that he had a very protected start to his career and that he does anticipate a big change in his workload now that he is coming to the end of his newly qualified year.

"I did start with a very light caseload 2 then come January it went up to 10 there have been fluctuations because of agency staff leaving or people on long term sick, taking cases on a temporary basis, so they have fluctuated, but about 12 -14. the senior pract's have more, about 18, most of those in court, I have a couple in court, but they are section 7, just doing that report on 3 children, so I am down to 9-10 now" N.3.102

N has valued the newly qualified programme but has felt that the assignments are a bit onerous on top of a full time job. The group supervision space with peers he has found useful and a learning environment.

"Having a separate nqsw supervision which is a different environment is good, you feel you might be able to talk more as your manager isn't there it is more

open umm in that respect, you are there with your peers people might be struggling with this or that and you can say you have tried this” N.3.125

“Different teams but you become good friends different levels of experience before starting work and because they are in different teams we learn from each other, especially for me who is in this team further along. Have an understanding “N.3.132

Alongside this he had had access to training courses on specific practice topics such as court work, mental health, and domestic violence.

N is conscious that he also has performance targets to achieve and looks to his casework to demonstrate his achievements. These were set around his first six months in practice and are coming up to be reviewed.

He uses reflective practice within his work and finds time both individually and in dialogue with a senior practitioner who is both familiar with his cases and more experienced than he.

“In the car is the best one but, yeah, there is time and certainly I find myself turning to the senior practitioner who had some of my cases when she was in the team before she then left to be a supervising social worker, got bored, and came back as a senior, so you have someone to work with there.” N.3.171

Supervision is available to N and the frequency and amount have changed over the year. He now gets supervision every 4-6 weeks formally but his manager is available for ad hoc discussion in between formal sessions. This arrangement suits N and he feels held in this work.

“Yeah a lot of ad hoc having a chat with the manager this is what I think, what do you think, and things like that instead of waiting till the next supervision time, it has been happening but it changes, not quite so often now.” N.3.178

“sometimes to start with they were a couple of hours and went through them all, now I take 2 or 3 in and rotate them as you can’t go through all of them every time.” N.3.184

N is aware of the difficulties of his peers who are in more frontline teams and feels that his experience is right for him at this point in his career.

“I hear of people in the assessment team who have 20-25 cases and things like that and are battling away there and I am glad because I don’t feel that would be the right type of team for me, you know, in that respect a bit more stability instead of being all over the place not knowing what day of the week it is.” N.3.195

He is also aware that a lot of his work is ensuring that everyone knows what has been done and who is accountable.

“arse covering and accountability.” N.3.248

N was asked for an image, symbol or word to sum up his view of his first year and his word was relief.

"I think a few words, suppose relief that I am still here at the end of the first year and I have not burned out or anything. You know it has been enjoyable and to be honest I get bored easily at work and I don't get bored here." N.3.252

N had clearly enjoyed his first year and felt that he had made steady progress and he was looking to continue gaining academic awards alongside being a social worker. He has no plans to change team and will work to consolidate this newly qualified experience.

"I do want to go on and get the PQ award or a masters" N.3.276

## Case study M

M is sponsored by child care services, having been a support worker in child care services. She has completed the BA social work pathway. She is at the time of the first interview awaiting a work placement as she is currently signed off sick following an accident. She hopes to return to work imminently. The lack of a job placement is frustrating. She has received sparse information from her employer and has had no details about the newly qualified scheme. She is aware from friends and university colleagues that there are going to be major changes to county child care services.

"I said even if you only send me X works (newsletter) I would know what is going on and could see this and that changing" M1.77

M does expect to have an induction but has heard from colleagues that this is not happening.

"Your induction should be your first 2 weeks but I have friends who have just been expected to run along as they have worked there before."M.1.91

M believes that the situation is such in some teams that there is not the space for people to have induction because of the lack of staff.

"some people have and some haven't, it depends what department your're, on because if your colleagues are run off their feet it is difficult to do"M.1.96

M had a weary view of the possibility of being in an assessment team and felt there would be few highlights to the work.

"Not sure there are any highlights in an assessment team"M.1.105

The work in an assessment situation would be challenging as parents are being challenged.

"it is about being honest with parents, what is it they are not doing "M.1.128

M was clear about the skills that she would need to do the task.

"Communication, that is vital, and reflecting skills, going back and thinking about what you have seen and reflecting on it, is there something I missed, thinking about theory, Erickson, developmental is that child developmentally delayed."M.1.147

When asked what was most surprising in her training, M said it was learning about her own prejudice and assumptions.

"That I have prejudice and stereotypes most surprising because I never thought I did, awareness of my own values, you have to be aware of them for



them not to be in the way, that shocked me, but not aware before I came here”M.1.158

“I learnt an awful lot doing the course. I am not a very confident person or confident in my abilities.”M.1.171

M’s father died while she was in training and this had a big impact both on her learning about herself and how she could not learn while in grief. This was followed by a fall and a head injury.

“I think it would have happened whether I was here or not but it did stop me learning for a while. I think it was such a big thing, then falling and hitting my head was difficult and almost stopped me carrying on”.M.1.180

This participant has wanted to be a social worker since she was a young woman.

“It is something I have wanted to do since I was 20 but didn’t have the self-belief”M.1.186

However, it was the encouragement of her manager that led to her applying for sponsorship.

“my team manager said I want you to go and do your degree and he kept on for a year saying, you frustrate me because every time there is training your name is down first and at lunch time you are always reading things not having done anything academic at any levels when I was younger I thought that would be a barrier”M.1.193

M thinks that there will not be enough time for reflection during her work hours.

“Not enough car journeys, not enough”M.1.213

“Car journeys backwards and forwards to different hospitals ...I think not enough as I would have liked. I never thought I was any good at reflection but she (supervisor) told me I was pretty good as you perpetually talk and thinking, wait a minute, then do”M.1.217

M has hopes of her new supervisor and compares how she feels now to her thoughts as a support worker.

“Well, as a newly qualified you are expected to have more. That is not necessarily what happens, does it. I was never very good at supervision as a family support worker as I had already discusses the work with the social worker. So never wanted to talk about what we had been doing so I never wanted to hear that we had done something wrong, didn’t do that quite right now I think learning through mistakes is some of the best learning so you don’t do it again. So I think now I appreciate the importance of supervision, discussing what you have done and come to a conclusion and you hear

yourself say things, find a right answer, the next stage comes to you, why did I not see that before, I hope I get good supervision”M.1.239

“I find informal supervision just as good if not better, more beneficial, than formal supervision. Going to someone and saying got this thing can we have a chat about it for 5 or 10 minutes. I found that more beneficial than the structured supervision cos they always have an agenda and what you really want to talk about like your personal development, how you are feeling, there are cases that get under your skin and really get you down and you need to tell someone that you are really struggling as a person to do what you have to do “M.1.251

M is clear that there is a lot that comes under the banner supervision from the personal development and coping to the administration and the meeting of targets.

University teaching and learning on placement are only one part of being a social worker. M is aware that she will need to learn the ways of a new team and that the system will have changed.

“university can only give you so much, you have been out on placement to learn the skills but that isn’t the team that you will be working in so you have the skills but you will be working in learning all over again, what you are going to be doing, meeting new people and there are going to be things that I say I did it like this 3 years ago but times have changed now “M.1.302

Although wanting to get going with her new career as a qualified social worker M also was scared of the responsibilities the job would bring.

“While I want to get a job I am also scared, desperately scared, you know, because it will be me making those decisions. Before it was me with a social worker now it is me making those decisions, that is scary, a very scary prospect, the longer I am out of it the worse it gets, from a little thing it becomes a humongous thing not practicing or not seeing other people struggle because I am not there.”M.1.434

The second interview with M took place after she had returned to work for six months. M was placed in a fostering team and describes her first six months as manic:

“Manic, that is the best way to describe it, join a team, run, manic, that is what it feels like”M.2.5

“They do say that the child care teams are really busy but in fostering it just seems constant, you just think things are going ok, then a phone call, the child has absconded, so you go, does the social worker know, does this know, that know, you know what are we going to do, do an incident report, just constant you go in with a plan for the day of what you’re going to do but it never works out so, you write it in your diary for the next day it never happens”M.2.18

This period is also marked by M being physically unwell and needing surgery.

"I thought that's ok all my cases will be local but 2 in the top end of Norfolk, 1 in Durham, lot more travelling than I thought, top end of Norfolk once a month, Durham once a month" M.2.29

The fact that M is a foster carer means that people around her think that she knows all the systems.

"cos I have been in fostering they think that I know everything and I try and explain that I know from the other side but I don't know what paper work has to be done, they say you have got to go to a review. I don't know what paper work has to be done, no explanation of the processes" M.2.39

M has informal support from someone in the team who was a newly qualified worker the year before. But finds that the team is so busy, that there are few people around to ask questions of.

"when I had a supervising social worker I use to think what an easy job they had just visiting foster carers thought that the job was easy hold reviews and things, but it is all the paperwork, little time with people as opposed to doing paperwork having to save the same thing here, here and here, never ending" M.2.66

The most difficult thing for M is her lack of confidence. This shows up in her work like attending panel discussions.

"Getting over my own lack of confidence in my ability that I can do it" M.2.86

"never had to go to present at panel and I was like a nervous wreck, had to go and read the whole of the file, what are they going to ask, how is the carer going to be because they are reluctant kinship carers, very reluctant, I got myself in quite a fluster" M.2.91

"my team manager has only just picked up that this can be an issue for me". M.2.103

Supervision has not been consistent for M and on the whole has been about case management.

"Supervision for me up to now has been all about case management up to now.... Well I am supposed to have it once a fortnight for the first 3 months and I think that that happened twice in the first 3 months, even though I said that we need to have supervision cos my team manager was managing 2 teams one in (town south) and here (north), I never seemed to get supervision, now it is happening once a month but I have to say we haven't had supervision for a month and now in supervision I say shall we book the next one" M.2.112

The team manager seems focused on the work and M is disappointed as he never seems to show interest in her development or any problems she may be facing in the work.

“Umm I think I am disappointed because you expect in supervision talking about your cases someone will say have you done that before ...this is what you do instead of me going out and asking someone else what do I do now “  
M.2.129

The newly qualified social work programme is another place to think and reflect about cases.

“It is quite good, we meet up once a month and go through the expectations and standards and the assignments we should be doing... I don't find it enough because it is very superficial, you might get out of 20 of us 2 of us have done the reading, so we can't discuss the articles cos not enough have read them”M.2.156

“for the assignments we have to use those 10 articles in our 2 assignments how to use them in your assignments, so if you haven't read them you are not able to chat about that.”M.2.180

“(referring to group supervision) we do have a chat about cases, one person will bring a case and discuss what has happened so far, what does need to happen and the theories behind that and we tend to talk about everyone else's cases not mine because I work in fostering and we don't need to think about that”M.2.206

M feels that she is working for a team that is not recognised by other child care workers as doing anything. The other workers do not have an understanding of the work that supervising social workers carry out. This leads to some displeasure on M's part:

“Those that annoy me most are those on the NQSW programme. With me, they don't have any concept of what the fostering service actually does”  
M.2.253

“Child care teams see fostering as an easy option, if you go into fostering you don't have to do anything, all that is seen is that my foster carers are looking after the children that they bring into care and if my foster carer is not doing the training to look after their child to understand the child's needs and I am not discussing it with her then the child's needs are not met. We should be working together they should let me know if they have concerns, I should let them know if I have concerns.”M.2.225

M finds that the pace of work in the office means that there is no time to reflect there. She uses her car journeys to reflect on her work.

“I call it social work in the car. After a visit I will think about it in the car on the way back sometimes that I have a light bulb moment, she said this this month,

that last month, this is not quite the right placement for this child, potentially that child shouldn't be there, I do reflection in the car either between visits or on the way home. Think about things "M.2.193

The challenging part of the job for M is realising that she does have limitations.

"I want to do a good job, try to do a good job, but sometimes I try to be the best at everything and sometimes that wears you out. I have to realise my limitations and that I cannot do everything.M.2.266

"I became a social worker because I wanted to help other people and fostering is a service I have been interested in since I was a child. (team manager) said, do you think too are going to stay, and I said I will stay as long as you allow me to stay as I love my job umm I would like to spend more time with children and doing direct work with the children, I do miss all of that stuff, but I do get my fix of babies and young children in placement. I did expect to have more time with the carer and children than I do"M.2.273

The skills that M is using most are observing and listening which are what she does while constantly assessing placements.

"Observing and listening, not taking things at face value that is important" M.2.293

Sadly M is aware that she has not been looking after herself doing this first six months.

"I haven't, I haven't" M.2.322

"No I haven't because I have got quite tired I started the end of November and I had 2 days holiday last week, no the week before that, is the only time I have taken off. I have worked more hours than I should work."M.2.328

"I am supposed to work 37 hours and I suppose I work a minimum of 43/44 most weeks. If I have a bad week like I have a shared carer who can only see me on a Saturday cos she works in London and I live in x she lives in Y ( 80 mile round trip approx..) and I have to drive to see her on a Saturday and I might do some work with the recruitment team, not get home till 10pm at night another day, and you know I have an early day when I have to be in Norfolk for 10am and in Colchester for a 5 pm visit, so on a bad week I might do 50-60 hours." M.2.334

These long hours are coupled with not taking breaks while in the office and therefore on occasions not eating all day.

"sandwich in the car or at the computer or not at all by the time I remember and think it is 3pm now, going home soon have me dinner then"M.2.364

“if I am not looking after myself....I can look after my family and if I work all the time I am not looking after the needs of my family and their worth more than the job, work life uni balance, where do they all fit in, and at the moment the uni stuff is left”M.2.473

M is aware of the pressures that foster carers feel especially at the weekend but it seems that this knowledge means that she has little or no boundary between working and not working.

“my carers know they can call me they call and say oh this and that, I say we will deal with it on Monday but let’s have a quick chat to think it through, it is not enough to call the emergency duty team but enough to have a chat with someone and I don’t count these as working time as I know, having been a foster carer the best way to alleviate anxiety is to have a quick chat, so someone will just text to say I need time on Monday but I do try to keep Saturday and Sunday for me and my husband and son and evenings”M.2.373

One part of this steep learning curve about self-care is that it is hard for her to switch off.

“It is not as easy to switch the brain off as I thought it would be I have thoughts and light bulb moments when I am not at work and have to write it down because it works 7 days a week, difficult to switch off...which frustrates my husband”M.2.513

“Trying , chaotic at times, made me learn about myself and my capabilities and that I have limitations, can’t be everything to everybody, and that is my biggest learning curve, and if I push too hard I will break” M.2.463

M does talk about her aloneness with some of the issues that she faces at work.

“if I had a team manager I could talk to a bit more I would not think I was carrying it all myself at the moment. I e-mailed a couple of times, should we not organise a professionals meeting, which is frustrating, the other team manager is saying we should have a professionals meeting, I don’t want to go behind my team manager he has to be there with me, answer my question, so I do hold on to much that should be shared ... not getting much back.. Record, record, record, leave that trail I have asked you that question, I have asked twice and you haven’t responded, what do I do” M.2.520

Philosophically M knows that at present she has a lot to learn and that tasks currently take longer as she does not know her way round the system and knows that with time this will ease.

“I am learning and it takes me longer to do things now because I am unsure about what to do but I will know this is a household review, this is what you do, going to panel, this is what you do, and it is done, rather that what do I do next, what do I do next that thinking all takes time” M.2.388

Despite all the issues that she has spoken about at the end of our interview she is clear that this is the work that she wants to do.

“I like my team, this is always the team that I have wanted to work in, when I went to do the degree I wanted to work in this team or adoption, I might want to move closer to home but in this work”M.2.453

The third interview took place at the end of her first year. M is in the same team and enjoying her job. She is however aware that her protected first year ends at the end of December, 2012.

“I enjoy my job, I know other people do my job in independent agencies who want to get out I quite like working for the council as they are supportive when they need to be and other times let me get on with my job.”M.3.79

“Yeah I will, will be glad to get to the end of the first year but also sad as I know my caseload is going to rocket.” M.3.9.

In actual terms her current caseload is 18 and is likely to rise to 25 in line with other team colleagues. M is clear that her confidence has grown and she has an opportunity to participate in all aspects of her job.

“Well, having got to the end of the first year I finally think that I am getting the hang of it, all the different paper work and the different meetings.” M.3.24

“confidence in myself... less of a wreck and being able to leave it behind, While I do work all the hours god sends and turn the laptop on most nights, I have been able to leave troubles behind, especially at the weekend, right” M.3.69

M was asked to describe the trajectory of her first year.

“It would be a slow upward, a step up, then plateau, then up. There have been some times when I wonder why I am doing this as I am constantly tired but once I thought I was able to leave it behind it was much easier” M.3.85

A theme throughout this first year for M has been taking time away from work.

“I had 4 study days for the first 4 assignments, just about to take some more for the second lot of assignments and have had 4 days holiday since April, no, since I started, but I have just booked a holiday for 2.5 weeks in January... I finally got to the point of, do you know what, I am going to take holiday, I am entitled to holiday and someone else can cope for a few weeks.”M.3.95

“That really is a corner.”M.3.111

There is a sense that M feels confident enough to think her cases will survive without her constant attention.

“and at weekends thinking this is my time with my children if they are home from uni or be with my husband.” M.3.121

M is on the newly qualified programme and has received a lot of support from the co-ordinator of the scheme, particularly with the assignment. M has always found the academic written work a challenge.

“From the NQSW co-ordinator a lot, she has been marvellous; she is the one who got me through the assignments.”M.3.149

“She has been brilliant this year brilliant and I think those who are doing ASYE are very lucky. Without her I am not sure that I would have got through it.”M.3.177

The support from her line manager has been less effective. The supervision she receives is caseload focused and discussions are case based only.

“Work wise a bit less so, they are so busy themselves, I have to go through all these outcomes, I think there are 48 of them, and my manager has cancelled the meeting 4 times when we were meant to go through them. He has to go through them and sign them off, twice he didn’t bother to turn up, what is that saying to me about my value in the team, so he hasn’t been as supportive, supervision is just case management, nothing about how do you feel, what is happening for you, how are you, gets to the end he turns his laptop off and is out the door saying he has a meeting to go to and you are left and that isn’t acceptable really” M.3.154

“he says you put in for the training you want to do, we don’t need to discuss training as you go off and do it”M.3.165

Case discussion and support is also available from the senior practitioners.

“I could go to the senior practitioners on the team they’re very good.” M.3.169

Throughout the first year peer group supervision has been offered. M is committed to this but not many of her peers are.

“No, I don’t think so, in fact that has tapered off now cos although I really enjoy it and make time in my diary others don’t. So say out of 10 of us maybe only 2 or 3 turn-up. Like now some people I haven’t seen for about 6 months and like now she is saying if you want you can come individually. Or join another group which is still going. I would like it to but I don’t think it will.”M.3.198

Reflective practice is an active part of M’s work.

“In the car from where ever wherever I am. Sometimes I wake up in the night with, that is what I am going to do, wake up and write it down. I do reflect a lot, sometimes at my desk if I am writing up a supervision note what did I do to stir



that up, and next time I will go back and discuss it because sometimes I may have touched a nerve from the past and we will have a discussion about it, it helps our relationship.”M.3.186

M believes that the work she does is what she expected to do as a supervising fostering officer; however, the amount of face-to face time compared to computer time is not what she expected. She spends about two thirds of her week at the computer screen.

“I do visits ever day, if I do 3 visits in one day that takes a day to write up, if I do a household review panel papers. 60-70% of my time sitting writing things up, there is an awful lot of paperwork”M.3.214

M was asked to give an image or symbol of her first year and spontaneously said a hangman’s noose. This she went on to describe as representing suffocating in paperwork.

“Sometimes I would say a hangman’s noose”M.3.232

“Yeah and sometimes you do feel like you are suffocating in paper work and you can’t just save it in one place but 2 or 3 places. If you forget to save it here you get told off for it, you have to lock the computer every time you go to the toilet, you do feel like suffocating in paper but I still enjoy my job.” M.3.242

M feels that her job is demanding and enjoys it:

“Personally, that I can do it....so much still to learn, you never stop learning there is always something to learn; learn; learn sitting down and learning different management strategies, the needs of disabilities children, like peg feeds, how to manage this and that, constant learning and reflection.” M.3.270

“It has been a bit up and down and I have learned a lot about myself, why something’s get to me and other things, personal things, how I manage some situations and others, that I need to talk to people about it when it touches things from my past, it affects the way I can deal with it, so the knowing self is quite important.” M.3.289

“I feel more in control.”M.3.297

M felt that being in more control of her work came around the six months point.

“That’s when I started to think that I haven’t written up that note today but that is alright I can do that tomorrow. If it didn’t happen I have written down what I need to do.”M.3.305

Reflecting over the first year, M could clearly see the development that there had been.

“How incompetent I felt at the beginning and thinking I shouldn’t have done this, it is not right for me, and the change now, that actually it was the right thing to do. I’m in the right team at the moment and I have grown in confidence, also my greatest memory was the face of my carer when the allegation was made and how I wanted to give her a cuddle and how I had to act so professional and how I felt a failure at not being able to give that emotional support they needed. I will never forget her face and the utter shock and how that impacted on her children as well, young mum being a good carer I know the children were not going to be removed but that I could not tell her that. Apart from that it has been a good year” M.3.361

## Case study: P

This participant is working in an adult services team. He graduated with an MA in social work and was a sponsored student. As a sponsored student he knew that he would be returning to the service sector, in this case adult services. However he did think that he would be given some choice of team on his return. He returned to the team where he had been an unqualified worker and was given no choice to be elsewhere. P did not object to this.

“Right from the beginning when I signed an agreement for coming back for 2 years I always knew that I would be coming back. I would not have much choice when I finished which in some ways was quite frustrating, in the beginning we were told that we would be given some choice, but it actually turned out that this was the only post offered to me when I finished. So there wasn't any choice there but I wasn't really unhappy because I thought I had worked here before and I knew what the job would roughly entail but I kinda feel a bit like I missed out a bit on that freedom, you know, of being able to look at other things, you know. My last placement was in child protection and I could quite happily take a job in something like that and they asked me if I wanted to stay, they knew that I would be willing to take the job, but I had to explain that because I was sponsored that that was not going to be” P.1.10

“I am lucky to be employed at the moment as when I think of others struggling to find a job, especially for newly qualified workers this might not be the ideal, but I still have a job which is the main thing at the moment” P.1.30

“I can't forget that I am very grateful to be in a post because if I had not been a sponsored student I might not have a job as a qualified practitioner right now. People who I trained with who I know are good and competent can't get social work jobs at the moment” P.2.121

“I am very lucky to be in work right now and don't lose sight of that” P.2.128

“I wonder how the others are getting on where my experience fits, it's hard to know. On placement I saw NQSWs having a hard time on placement and I wonder about the others from the course, is it what they expected, do they love it? What is happening to my colleagues?” P.1.432

This man is both gratified to have a job but also disappointed that the local authority has not thought about where else he could work but returned him to his old post, but now as a qualified worker

“a bit disappointed because we had to say to the council what our preferences were and I put down mental health saying, please could you see if you have any vacancies and they didn't” P1.39

The choice to do mental health is a positive and one that would have built on his placement experience from his first year.

“yeah, yeah in my first year so that was not going to be an option so looking at the bigger picture I guess there is a bit of disappointment.” P.1.43

The return to the same team had compensations in knowing members of staff. This was also a double edged sword as he was treated as he was before. At the beginning he was also doing the same type of work that he had done before university training.

“I knew a few people from working here before” P.1.50

“ people treat me the same. Before I was quite competent and people thought that too so people think I am ready to swim not sink” P.1.462

However the context of the office was changing rapidly and within a fortnight of his return there was talk of cost savings and possible redundancies.

“in my second week back we were all summoned to a mandatory meeting everyone in this part of the service and were told there would be some drastic changes in the way that this service works that £4.2m needs to be saved from the purchasing budget. And if not done there will be staff redundancies” P.1.52

This throws the department into a spiral of despair and low morale. However P felt that the county council had invested in him so that he felt relatively safe.

“because they have invested a lot in my training so don’t think that I will be top of the list to be made redundant” P.1.56

P is more concerned about the type of change that will be brought about but the savings initiatives and how he will be expected to act

“I am more concerned about, and I am worried about, this is our role and what we will be asked to do because they are proposing talking of reviewing how we provide, creating new teams that are going to be focused on reviewing and cutting people’s cost of care packages to make savings. That’s not going to be a nice job to do “. P.1.62

Alongside his concerns about the way that the savings plans may affect his work, he is also concerned about the effect that departmental changes might have on the support and management that he might receive. For example will he have a supervisor on site who he can complete the NQSW programme documentation with? Without a supervisor close at hand, completing the programme and getting paper work signed off will be more complicated.

“I’m anxious to have a supervisor on site for me to go to and cos I’ve got to meet the NQSW programme learning outcomes, so those are the anxieties for me, so it feels a bit of a kick in the teeth, so soon after, 2 weeks after you start coming back, people say this is how it is in social services constant change never stability.” P.1.67

P shows both anxiety and upset at the changes but is also philosophical that this is how social services is. This view of social services comes from his unqualified experience and through his contact with social workers in his office base who had been around in the service for many years.

P has concerns about who his supervisor will be and did not meet this person prior to taking up his post.

“the snr. practitioner who will be supervising me was on holiday” P.1.75

“I met with the team manager” P.1.75

“I felt quite protected and trust her, things would be ok under her management, I knew her before” P.1.76

“I am hoping my supervisor will talk about things, like as part of the nqsw, that will help me do that and not lose sight of this aspect (theory to practice), not just the paper work and deals with funding for people” P.1.332

However, with the savings initiative the relationship with this manager may be short lived as part of saving is the rationalisation of teams.

“but that might all change so I feel a bit insecure roll, with it and see and I don’t particularly want to be doing a job where our brief is to reduce people’s funded care wherever possible” P.1.78

The job that the staff are being asked to do, which is review all service packages and reduce where possible, doesn’t fit with the training that the man has had.

“it doesn’t feel very nice and not in tune with the social work rhetoric, you could call it part of working for local authority” P.1.81

When asked specifically about supervision in the first few weeks of getting into this job as a newly qualified worker, he said that he had not had supervision but had had meetings to set his goals and target for his first year. This is in the context both of job uncertainties and an individual taking on new cases which have as their brief to reduce services where possible.

“I have had a couple of meetings, first week and weeks later, with my line manager to look at my performance” P.1.91

“like a self-audit looking at skills and targets for the year you can see if you met objectives which translates into an increase in pay at the end of the year if you meet all the objectives. Started that but haven’t had clinical supervision, everything is now on hold, so we will have to see wait about what will happen” P.1.97

P has not had supervision and did not have an allocated supervisor which meant that he was beginning with no planned supervision, no one to plan or

check out his work with in a disciplined and regular way. This meant that he had no space to work with another person and reflect on his practice. He could think about his work by himself but no one was helping him link theory to practice or helping him make sense of his return to adult services following his last placement which was in child care.

“On placement we had a practice teacher linking theory and practice, I don’t know if that will happen here, I think it is important and like it” P.1.341

The supervisor is seen by P as the key link for the NQSW programme but he doesn’t have a named individual four weeks into his job.

“everything links in and the supervisor is a key person in the NQSW programme.” P.1.105

The information available about the nature of the programme is scant. P returned to the workforce at the end of May. However the NQSW programme which will be across adult services will not begin till September.

“Set programme across adult services but doesn’t start formally till September. We have been given sketchy ideas.... meet these outcomes but still waiting for the details yet.” P.1.110

P is facing a very uncertain time. Although personally he believes that he will continue to have work because he has just been the recipient of a 2 year expensive training programme, he is being affected by the context around him. On a personal level he is also feeling that the negativity around him can stick to him and bring his mood down.

“I think my feelings keep changing.... sometimes cos I feel I think.... last week the meetings and then our service manager came and we all had a 15 minute slot 1-1, after that felt really demoralised I suppose cos we don’t know. Lots of rumours flying around and other peoples negativity can rub off on you really easily and I’m really aware of that so I try to distance myself, but one evening last week I felt really down in the dumps about it P.1.119

There is an air of feeling cheated because he has committed two intense years in getting his qualification and maybe he is not going to be able to deploy the skills that he has learned.

“....the course was really difficult, it has been an intense 2 years and all of us gave it everything and we all thought about the end” P.1.124

“The amount of work and being on placement, balancing the demands first placement not as intense as the second, second was hectic. First one I was protected and had more time, not so in the second one” P.1.453

“.... what was the point of doing all of that and I’m worried that I’m not going to be able to use the skills that I have learned”P.1.125

“if we were moved to these work streams to cut care packages we wouldn’t be using the skills as we trained to do” P.1.132

Despite all that is going on in his workplace, P is conscious that he is working and that the intensity of training is over.

“glad as I don’t have to work in the evening I’m getting a salary, and hopefully I’ll have a job for at least 2 years. I know people who don’t have jobs and are struggling, I’ve just got to sit it out....not that bad, ride it out” P.1.140

“I will feel better when I know what we are doing. Even if it is something I don’t want to do I will try and make the best of it” P1.148

There is a stoic commitment to the job in hand and a preparedness to make the best that he can of this difficult experience, knowing that he has no real choice other than to go with what his employer offers as he has been sponsored and the only other way would be to repay his training fees.

P was not offered any formal induction as he had been a previous employee and had done his training placements in the county. However this did not take account of the fact for the last year he had undertaken a child care placement so had not been kept up to date with changes within adult services. He was told to look at the services changes and local resource changes but with no guidance.

“I was told to go look at the local resources that had changed did that in first couple of weeks, and I have had training on the computer system. That was it in terms of induction” P1.161

The return to work as a qualified worker did also have some highlights. One was that he was already familiar with work colleagues in the locality.

“Good to see people who I have worked with before, people who I already had a relationship with, don’t have to go through the whole processes of building up rapport with people if you already know someone. I feel happier here because of that as opposed being somewhere where I would know any one. There is some natural support which is good umm” P1.172

There was also the opportunity to hear how people that he had worked with as clients had moved on since he was last in the team.

“I worked with lots of clients here I did a lot of casework in this team before, so I know a lot of clients. Hearing about how things have progressed with service users is quite nice, how things have changed” P.1.176

There was an important practical positive thing that was the reinstatement of a parking permit, something denied to students.

“and having a car park permit” P.1.182

The allocation of work to P was gradual and in the beginning not dissimilar to what he had done prior to going to university. He also was asked to carry out a duty social worker's functions in the first week, which was daunting as he had not had opportunity to take in all the changes that there had been in his absence.

"They have started me off gradually getting bits and pieces from here and there, put on the duty rota in the first week so that was a bit anxiety making, a bit daunting" P.1.189

"Well I suppose that I haven't been asked to do anything so far that I wouldn't have done before the course but I'm hoping that as I'm here longer and get more confident that my responsibilities will get bigger" P.1.211

From his previous experience P was aware of the stress levels that can develop in the profession and feels that he is prepared for this but that he will not know until he has the full experience, being aware that he can only be guided by previous experience, most recently on placement in a busy child assessment team.

"When I was here before a lot of the social workers were really stressed left burned out purely with the amount of work had to do...They left because of how difficult... how stressful some of the families are and how complicated it is to get things sorted out which are relatively simple things. And part of me thinks I can handle that level of stress but maybe I don't know because I haven't been there yet.....am I being over confident." P1.232

The context of this team in this changing environment with the possibility of redundancies is that if workers leave they are not always replaced. This will have an affect on P as the manager will not be able to categorically ensure that he has a protected caseload as per the guidance of this county council within his first year of qualified practice.

"Well as a NQSW there is a protective caseload and the manager said that we will try to stick to it if we can but not sure what it is yet. Can't promise so don't know" P.1.241

This seems like a veiled threat and there is no clarity about what a protected caseload will look like even if it is held to. The worker needs to trust the person allocating the work to protect them. With all this uncertainty and possible issues P was asked what strategies had been employed to look after himself. It was clear that a stable home environment is what he drew on.

"I think outside of work I live with my girlfriend who also works in social care, she knows what it is like and that helps as it is not always easy to understand" P.1.256

P also was aware that he is an organised person and that this would be important at time of high workload and work pressures.



“I am also quite an organised person” P.1.260

However he was also quick to acknowledge that he would not know how he would react until that was tested.

“but I don’t know if the flood gates open how I will cope, we will see”P.1.261

“I have done this sort of work before, I am bracing myself, I think I know to some degree what it is like and trying to prepare” P.1.266

This participant felt that he had a good idea of the stresses and strains of working in a busy team. He also believed that his placement experience of a busy child assessment team in a small city was good preparation for what was to come. Particularly as in this team he did not feel protected and at the end of his placement they had offered him a post.

“I was not really protected very much, so many cases ,you get treated like you are qualified, you are given your cases and told to go and get on with it, basically good learning experience which I think I coped pretty well with it ,which will have prepared me “P1.268

“my last placement was in child protection and I could quite happily take a job in something like that and they asked me if I wanted to stay they knew that I would be willing to take the job, but I had to explain that because I was sponsored that that was not going to be” P.1.17

In the early days of his job P came into contact with a large group of providers from his county at a conference day. He was mildly shocked by the way these people talked about social workers. He realised that the cuts and changes in the work of social care have far reaching changes to a variety of different people, not just service users.

“people from all over(named place) were so derogatory about social workers, very uncomfortable, and made me aware about how badly the profession is viewed by people who I consider to be colleagues. It made me quite angry actually but it is their livelihoods if we are cutting care and it’s their jobs” P.1.290

P was not sure that the saving exercises and cuts to services were not taught on his social work course. He was not sure that statutory social work as it is in local authorities is what he was taught in the class room or on placement.

“I don’t think that’s how it is, kinda taught on the course, I don’t know whether that is if the course does not teach what statutory social work is about really“P.1.316

“you forget this when you are learning, person centred theory and human growth and development, it is a long way away from what we do on a daily basis” P.1.326

On placement he was in the child care sector, which is not as budget driven at team level as adult services are.

“children’s social care, the emphasis is different, it isn’t so much about budgets and providing care meeting needs. I was in the intake and assessments team, we would do the assessments and things, we would not provide services, it was rare that a child came into care very rare “ P.1.321

“our clients here require funded care packages but I experienced this before and know this is how adult services operate and all of the services in adult social care are funded care” P.1.324

P was clear that in his first 4 weeks that accountability, the law and communication skills were key to his practice. P was very clear about the level of responsibility that he feels that the social worker carries.

“I think accountability. Legal responsibilities, legal reasons for what we are doing” P.1.352

“Obviously the communication stuff” P.1.355

Communication is in this instance not just about relaying messages to people but ensuring that all parties in a care plan understood what was happening and what was expected of them.

“Tying it all together, be diplomatic. That is key as you are the link person, really important tying everything together” P.1.359

“Yeah, but it is all on the social worker’s head, always our responsibility. It shouldn’t be like that but that is, how it is that’s how it was on my placements, to tie it all together, we chair reviews, write it up, action everything, and I think unfairly that social worker is responsible for everything, keep everyone updated and on side.” P.1.368

There is also a difficulty with this level of communication in that the computer system in the local authority is slow. His experience is that it is not just the technology that is slow but also the systems for getting funding and resources approved.

“Communicating individually more important, the system here is slow, appalling, everyone says it is, so speaking and e-mail dialogue and face to face meetings” P.1.387

The levels of decision making are many and even if he is on top of the issues that need to be addressed it can take 12 weeks to get decisions made. People outside the system do not understand the difficulties and on occasion think that the worker is being lazy and not doing what has been agreed.

“Just the difficulty to get things through the system, lots of agreements and panels, write then quality check and then to other panels, other people don't realise how difficult the system is” P.1.399

“(panels) It can be or it can take 12 weeks it just depends which is shameful” P.1.417

“People think that you are being lazy” P.1.422

There are many things that are uncertain in these first weeks of return. However, P is still enthusiastic about chosen social work career. The course provided information and experiences but that the reality of local authority work is far from what has been taught, particularly in the light of cost savings. The course feels to P as a bracket piece of time not really connected to the reality of his current situation.

“this is definitely what I want to do, I just hope that the job will be fulfilling. That is what it is about” P.1. 488

At the 6 month point since training P was interviewed a second time.

P had had a period of uncertainty that lasted about 6 weeks and then he got the post that he had wanted but lost the support of the line manager whom he had been employed by and trusted. This was because there has been a major reorganisation which has reduced the number of teams but made each team larger. This will necessitate a geographical relocation. At the time of the interview he was based in a satellite office with 2 other workers and no team manager on site.

“I got the job that I pretty much want to do but the team manager that I was with has been pulled away to do a different task, which was unfortunate as she interviewed me and I trust her to give me the support. That was disappointing but my supervisor who was a senior practitioner stayed the same so that was good” P.2.8

Throughout this time of change P felt that there had been good support from him from his line manager and informally by her and other members in the team.

“I think informally they have been really good” P.2.30

“I get on well with her and I can always go and talk things through with her which is really good.” P.2.30

However formal support through supervision was not so secure or in line with the expectations of the Newly Qualified Social Worker programme..

“Yeah, formal supervision doesn't happen as much as it should do and...umm the rhetoric around the newly qualified programme doesn't deliver what it says it will. “P.2.36

“Yeah, yeah, it says that starting you should have supervision every week building to fortnightly for the first 6 months and monthly thereafter but that hasn’t happened at all, there was a significant period of time when I did not have supervision at all, but it is really hard to find the time as I am really busy and my supervisor is really busy” P.2.41

The implication here is that the supervisor had no time to give supervision, let alone offer more time to someone at this point in their career. There is a sense of disappointment as well as resignation.

P was part of the NQSW programme and appeared to enjoy the contact with other recently graduated workers; the programme itself seemed to be focused on getting through the programme not about the development of the worker.

“The newly qualified programme, we have to go to workshops occasionally every so often we get together all the newly qualified workers from adults get together, we have got like a portfolio and we go through the learning outcomes and we get together people in similar situations, which is really good and as part of that there is the expectation that you will be doing extra training and I have been doing lots of training, that is good” P.2..48

The other aspect of being newly qualified is having a protected caseload. In the first few weeks this had not been clarified and by the end of his first 6 months P has no experience of being protected. Also a protected caseload does not seem to be at any particular level and there appear to be no descriptors of either the size of an individual caseload or a measure for complexity.

“as far as the caseload is concerned they say that you should have a protected case load but not what that is and that each worker is different from the other so it is individual ~I don’t think that I have a protected caseload and at the moment I have 39 cases open.” P.2.57

“my supervisor ...(is) aware that I have a lot of cases.” P.2.70

The pace of change for P is clear and when asked about what had surprised him in the first 6 months pace of change was what he said. This is interesting as this is a man who had both experience of the sector and of the county council, but on returning this is what had hit him.

“the pace of the change, not just the way that we work but the process, the difficulties of getting funding agreed, and it is getting worse” P.2.75

There is a real sense of huge and unquantifiable change resulting in a reduction in staff, partly by the removal of all agency staff and that vacancies are not being recruited to. This is not being processed by staff, however, because they are too busy.

“I think we just get stuck in do what you have to do” P.2.86

P was now half way through his newly qualified year but when asked about feeling newly qualified he was on the cusp of change.

“Sometimes I do, sometimes I don’t” P.2.90

P had been an unqualified social worker in the same office and team. Other workers have formed opinions about him and he experiences a different level of expectation upon him. He feels he is being treated differently to a newly qualified worker who was unknown to them.

“I was here as an unqualified worker as obviously people now knew me then see me not as vulnerable or inexperienced as another newly qualified person. Now with the changes there is me and another qualified practitioner 2 senior practitioners, and the rest are unqualified workers” P.2.90

“unqualified workers quite often they come to me for support and advice so then I don’t feel like a newly qualified “ P.2.93

This small team in a satellite office affects the type of work that he undertakes. His work has a high statutory component which brings with it accountability for ensuring that the law is applied with due diligence.

“there are things that you can only do if you are registered in this profession like mental capacity assessments and we get a lot of those there are 4 of us but only 2 of us to go and do those” P.2.98

“I am acutely aware that I am more accountable than when I was unqualified because before I could say I am not qualified” P.2.107

“you have to stand on your own 2 feet, no one will carry you through if you are planning for a service user it is up to you to do it properly” P.2.133.

He also seems acutely aware of the difference between the qualified and the unqualified experience, in that your supervisor is not there to protect you.

“when you are a student if t you have other pressures too like much work you could say that to your supervisor and it would be taken off you but you don’t have that any more” P.2.135

P enjoys the multidisciplinary nature of his work and this contact with other professionals has an affirming aspect to his development as a social worker.

“I think I am getting on well with people here and with other stakeholders multidisciplinary colleagues. I think people are gradually thinking highly of me sounds arrogant but respect me, that is good, which is a highlight for me personally” P.2.113

However, working with other professions appears to mean that the social worker is always seen as the centre of the communications web. The co-ordination role is expected by other professions to be filled by the social worker in the case. This appears so even if the social worker does not have a central role in the case.

“Communication in the sense of co-coordinating and organising even in circumstances where we don’t seem to need to be involved, you always seem to be the person to call people back, make sure things are in place in time, on time, speak to everybody, and if you forget something will go wrong, you feel like you are spinning lots of plates, that is the key skill I suppose” P.2.147

The analogy of plate spinning was used which was graphic and led to a vision of him potentially keeping 39 spinning plates in the air.

“that gets difficult if you are spinning lots of plates all at once” P.2.155

“Prioritising, constantly looking at my ladder (a tool for tracking case progress) making sure that nothing is missed cos I do know workers that have done that and the consequences are have been quite serious and I don’t want that to happen, and I can see how easy it would be to do that if you don’t keep your eye on the ball so to speak” P.2.159

Within this awareness of accountability is also the view that there are tough consequences for those who fail to keep all plates spinning. This has the air of a punishing environment not an enabling one. In this climate P has been able to carve a path which has meant that he completes his work but has maintained a home work balance. There are people with whom he works who get in at 7 and there are those who work several hours over each working day. P is clear that he needs to rely on his organisational skills to help him maintain a manageable diary and not to work very long hours.

“I probably do more than the 37 hours that are contracted, there are people here who stay late into the evening but I don’t do that.” P.2.166

“I try to get away at half 5, I don’t take much of a lunch break, most days about 20 minutes, some evenings I stay ½ hour to an hour because I think it is a bit of a slippery slope” P.2.168

“If plates are wobbling that is where the organisation (personal organisational skills) comes in (gives case example of someone who is moving placement) If you know someone is moving, leaving a bit of time in your diary as inevitably something will go wrong” P.2.175

With regard to reflective practice it is an area that he feels is good about the newly qualified programme as there is an opportunity every 3 months to get away from the workplace and think.

“Well I think that is one good thing about the newly qualified you do get time away from the office to think” P.2.181

He is clear that time for thinking about the work that he is doing is limited. Supervision is not a place for reflection but for case management.

“you definitely don’t get as much time as when you are a student to think about your work and in supervision you go through all the cases you have got” P.2.186

“reflection is compartmentalised into training times or self-reflection in the car when driving to an appointment or back from an appointment, in the car generally driving anywhere, but formally it is not as easy as you are led to believe.” P.2.198

The in-house training courses that he has completed in the first 6 months alongside the NQSW programme have been focused on internal processes and systems within the local authority. Issues of practice are left to the practitioner to follow up and keep abreast of good practice and research within the specialist field.

“you do have to do it off your own bat” P.2.221

The experience of working in adult care is led by finance. Social workers are expected to understand and use budgets ensuring that the money is spent how the local authority expects.

“one of the major things is everything here is geared around money, we have a lot of service users with personal care budgets and support plans, you do have to get down into number crunching, we do often joke that we should have done degrees in accounting not social work because you do have to get down to lots of issues coming to the team about funding and you have to have a good grasp of figures to be able to do it. It has always been like that but more now with calculations trying to make budgets add up, trying to find out why money hasn’t been spent paying invoices” P.2.144

This shift seems to be taking up time and energy from P and appears to be at greater depth than even managers have experienced.

“me and the team manager spent 2-3 hours trying to work out the support package. She was a very experienced social worker and manager and was saying that she had never had to get involved with figures at this depth before in front line work, it is a new thing we have to face, it was astonishing, you should have seen it, it was so complicated with all the different funding streams” P.2.289

P has disappointment in the portfolio that he is expected to complete as a part of his assessment for meeting the criteria of the NQSW programme. The folder that he has to complete is competence based. The portfolio is asking for evidence of particular aspects of social work for example making a referrals but is experienced as being out of touch with what has been learned

on the university training programme and on placement. P experienced this as frustrating.

“in the context that we work and with the pressures that we are under it sets itself out and makes it sound that everyone who comes out is incompetent and needs to be babied all the time not able to do things” P.2.336

“Having time to reflect about work and life and your work with services user would be much more beneficial” P.2.341

“feels like a chore not helpful” P.2.347

“Doesn’t really acknowledge the qualification” P.2.354

At the end of the first year P was interviewed for a final time. The interview took place at a 3rd location which mirrored the moves that he had made in office location within his first year and each office location move necessitated a change of team. These changes also took place within the transition that was happening in relation to social care nationally.

“It’s been like there are so many changes it has been incredible” P.3.9

“I don’t know how to describe it, you just have to get stuck in and you get bombarded with so much work that you have just got to try and do as best you can, that is all you can do really, and with all the office moves as well. Challenging I, I suppose it’s challenging, moving in with other people, we did that once and then we moved again with other people, and all the disruption that brings” P.3.19

P felt that the second six months were better than the first.

“so looking back we are in a better place from when I last saw you in November but you never know what might happen next” P.3.48

“I think that there are more changes but nobody knows what they are we are just going to have to wait and see” P.3.53

The interview day marked the day that his manager signed off his papers so he was no longer a newly qualified worker. He reflected on this and said that he had gradually felt that he was not a newly qualified worker and that this gradual movement had been completed by having his manager formally acknowledge that.

“cos I can ditch the label today as this morning I had supervision with our manager and it all got signed off so technically that is done so I don’t feel like a newly qualified social worker ” P.3.65

“I think gradually more and more people look to you or ask you questions as they think that you might know and when people in the team who have been



in the team longer or seniors ask you things you know that you are seen to be competent” P.3.71

“I think it is gradual you realise that I am competent”P.3.79

“looking back I felt ,yeah, I know what I am doing now, probably after doing it for a couple of months, you know it, you know the processes and you know what you are doing” P.3.90

P thought that he felt like this before the end of the first six months and that feeling had grown over the second six months. .P went on to describe a disappointment with the NQSW programme as it was a tick box exercise experienced as a chore.

“it was a real tick box exercise, we were meant to have protected time to do it but that went out the window so I did it at weekends as I just wanted to get it done out the way, cos they won’t let you do any of the PQ modules until you have done it”P.3.105

Overall he gives his experience as not being protected but is quick to say that he does not feel that he has missed out as he is well supported by the team. This informal support/supervision has filled the gap of formal supervision.

“Supervision with lots of informal supervision, there are always people that you can ask, supervision doesn’t always happen as regularly as it should do but I don’t feel as if I have missed out which is the key point I think” P.3.121

P also acknowledges and takes responsibility for the fact that he had not felt the need to ask for protection as he was coping and doing a good job.

“I wasn’t really pushing it because I was coping” P.3.129

“if I was really struggling I would ask and I hope that I would be listened to and something would be done.... they can see that it is not going to send me over the edge if they give me another case or a couple of cases.  
” P.3.143

This first year has provided job satisfaction.

“look back at cases from start to finish and see the outcomes and see that they outcomes are good” P.3.157

Conversely there have been times when he has been overwhelmed and felt out of control. Using the plate analogy he felt there were times when a plate would inevitably come crashing down as too many were spinning.

“Because I have also been on the duty rota there have been a couple of occasions where we have been so short of staff that it has been me and one other person in the office and we have been bombarded and it is not a nice feeling when it happens as you start to feel out of control, it has only been a

couple of occasions but it is not a nice feeling... because of those pressures you are forced into bad practice and not doing your job as well as you could do " P.3.173

The pressure of the work is an ever present feature and P expresses the need to be disciplined so that you are not taken over by work. He feels that the work can expand to fill whatever time there is and because of that the worker has to say when enough is enough and that they have done all they can for the day. There is a tension here as the work is focused on vulnerable people and the worker is responsible for doing what they can for service users.

"this work has no boundary, it's the nature of the work. I'm sure it is because it is about people, vulnerable people2 P.3.207

This theme continues when taking about breaks.

"No, in other jobs people can just go home it is the same if you go on leave things are left bubbling and not dealt with till you are back. I had 4 days off sick unplanned, there were things and deadlines to meet so I came back sooner that I should have... social workers feel the individual responsibility, work is not dealt with if you are away" P.3.212

P does not talk about stress directly but there are indicators that life in the frontline has many pressures and that being on duty is where this is all crystallised because of the bombardment rate.

Throughout the year there has been a great deal of learning and much of that has been about practice experience of things that had been learned theoretically during training.

"That the more cases, more work you do, the better your idea is about eligibility. You get more baselines, more confidence in the assessment of needs, where it all fits, see the whole spectrum, and therefore how to position cases. At uni we did do about fair access but not until you get the experience it doesn't mean as much including seriousness and risk" P.3.228

"Training is a good preparation but it is not in depth of knowledge about a specific area, you learn the legal stuff, grounded in social work theory but I now have specific knowledge of the client group-for example, autism and all the syndromes, learning about mental health as many client have mental health issues, so I know about medication and the services available in the area," P.3.267

A recurring theme in the previous interviews was a lack of time and space for reflection, this is still the case.

"I reflect instinctively when I'm driving going home go over things in my head sometimes it happens spontaneously when I'm sitting at my desk I get an idea about a case" P.3.236

Supervision is the place of case management or workload management with little space for reflection and in-depth thought and planning of a case.

“Limited by the amount of cases not the focus... you may reflect on one or 2 specific cases but not the work across the board, legality, risk complex but just 1 or 2” P.3.247

P was asked to give an image for his first year; he chose a book with a series of chapters.

“Changeable a book with chapters, May to August, September to January, April to now, this reflects the setting, changes and moves” P.3.251

P is still clear that whatever has befallen him in the first year of qualified practice he is better off than many who trained at the same time as him.

“I feel relieved that I was sponsored but also a bit of survivor guilt. I went to the Community Care live and was on the X stand talking to NQSWs, just informal talking, and many of them were at their wits end. In this team we are getting 4 people who are coming back which is why we have no vacancies, I did feel guilty and sad these were people who started at the same time as me, 2009, nobody thought this would be the situation” P.3.279

## Case study S

This participant graduated with a BA in social work and was a self-funding student. She has found employment in a qualified practitioner post in a county council adult services team for people with learning disabilities. In the course of the research S moved to New Zealand and the third interview was conducted by skype.

“I was one of the lucky ones I interviewed and got the second job I applied for. I was interviewed they phoned me the next day.” S.1.38

“I will be working with adults in residential care out of county. it is an out of county team... will be spending one week out of three away from home. not ideal” S.1.153

“Yes. I will not be a social worker in my job but I’m a self-directed support practitioner. so technically I am not even a social worker. that’s the new terminology in adults and if you are unqualified you’re a self-directed support facilitator.” S.1.11

“They are not called social workers, you are either a facilitator or a practitioner, apparently it takes away some of the stigma but when you turn up at someone’s front door saying that you are a SDS practitioner they look blankly, but when you say you are social worker, they say come in, not very user friendly, not sure it works” S.1.17

The process of finding a job was made complicated and daunting for graduates as when they came towards the end of their course and looked at the local county recruitment site they found that there were few jobs to apply for. This was both shocking and a change from how things had been at the start and during their training.

“when you look at the (county council) website you realise there are only 3 qualified social work posts being advertised for the whole of (county council) that’s when you start to have sleepless nights, I certainly did, when the reality dawns on you that might not be able to pay your rent, with the recruitment freezes coming in I’ve been really lucky and the team that I got a job with were quite clear that they would not be doing any more recruiting” S.1.46

This lack of jobs had led to both competition between people who had been supporting each other through the training, and to envy between the have and have not’s.

“was very difficult and is causing difficulties for us as students as we are all competing for the same jobs... I was sitting next to someone and another person said, you’ve got a job haven’t you, I said yes, and the person next to me said she interviewed for that job and you get a lot of friction now between us because of the competition. For the last 3 years we have supported each

other and all of a sudden we are competing to get jobs. It's very difficult."  
S.1.61

Aware that if you are a sponsored student you do not get much choice in the placement that you get on return to full time working.

"my best friend was sponsored and she was put where there was a gap with no choice, she found that very hard and she has ended up in frontline child protection, that is very hard, isn't what a NQSW would do, it is very hard"  
S.1.70

S puts across the competition for jobs and the lack of choice for newly qualified practitioners. The local authority has little work to offer NQSWs and from being on placement, she knew that a further recruitment freeze was looming. S goes on that when beginning training she had considered the emotional journey that she would have been on during training but not the transition from university to a qualified social work post.

"I signed up, I thought the emotional level and personal journey was the issue that I needed to be concerned about but we don't get much support in trying to do everything at once. We don't get support with that transition I found from getting the degree to getting jobs."S.1.104

"when we started the course we were told it's alright social workers get jobs and that mentality carried on and didn't change. When the job market and when the recruitment freeze came, people said oh my goodness didn't know the economy was that bad. Well, yes, this is the reality there are social workers who graduated last year who are still signing on because they can't get jobs, it's terrible." S.1.110

S had been clear that the job market would be tough because she was in a local authority team while on placement and saw that agency workers, even those who had been working for the local authority for a long time were being "let go." And not being replaced.

"My caseload as a student was higher because there were not enough social workers to carry the work load... I should have had been 4-6 cases depending on complexity, my caseload went up to 10 at one point with 3 complex cases"  
"S.1.122

"I did the work and made it known that I would do the work but only with extra supervision. They did try and accommodate me being a student and things like that "S.1.136

The post that S has in the out of county placements team suggests that it could be quite an isolated role. This is not just in regard to the travel requirements but also that the team base will move and it is envisaged that the workers will mostly work from home when not on visits.

“The difficulties will be being away from home so much and after 6 months I will be working at home which is going to be difficult especially in my first year.” S.1.217

S is conscious that even though she had a higher case load as a student she was looked after and is anxious about what will happen in the new job.

“I know that I am going out on a visit on Tuesday. I start my job Monday, on Monday that is accompanied, thank goodness. I will have visits booked up for next week, I think it will be quite a shock to the system, but I will have to wait and see because I have had a protected case load, extra supervision, all of those bubble wrapping things” S.1.237

The issues of supervision were not discussed at interview and subsequently S had not met her supervisor. The other information that she has is that the office base that she starts at will not be where the manager remains; the official team home is to move in the near future.

The transition from studying to starting work seemed to be a quick one and to have left little time for this participant.

“my feet have not touched the ground, no chance to relax no chance to wind down, gone straight in.”S.1.270

There had been no discussion of an induction and S thought that because she had been on placement in adult services and had availed herself of many training courses about the internal processes and procedures within the county council she would need very little.

“No, their main concern was whether I had had swifts and Oscars training like for the computer system and once they knew that and that I had had an induction programme in my placement team, I think their mentality was that I did not need one, so we might have to have a little bit of a conversation on Monday, I am going to need to have specialist training, support , to shadow people, to know their processes, how they work, and I am going to have to be organised in saying, this is the training I have done and this is what I need.” S.1.283

S said that she was clear that there was not an NQSW programme in adult services.

“I don’t get the NQSW package as I am working in adult services, that scheme is for those working with children, there is no funding for working with adults, I won’t be getting that or coming back to university or the certificate at the end of it.” S.1.310

“At interview they said that they would work something out for me but it would not give me a certificate that some of my colleagues will get.” S.1.317

S was very knowledgeable about the first year in practice and gains information from the BASW website. If she does not get a package from her employer she will be proactive in ensuring that her needs are met using a template from the BASW website. At interview a protected caseload was discussed but not what this might look like.

“Yes, they said they will try to make sure that I have a protected caseload and all the rest of it. My contract doesn’t say that I have a protected caseload but I will be hoping, but my friend who is in children’s is already burning out” S.1.330

This out of county post means that S will do one week of reviews on a regional basis and then write these up before the next week of reviews. Organisational skills will be critical she thinks. When looking at the skills that she thinks will be most important on the job she said listening and communicating, giving the following example from her placement experience.

“To be honest sitting and having a cup of tea most people seem to want this” S.1.369

“the main thing we do is listen cos so much of the time what the person says is the problem is not the problem and unless you sit and listen, do a holistic assessment” S.1.393

S will be interested in how you review a person’s whole year in the space of one visit.

The issues of time will also affect reflective practice possibilities. However S will have many long care journeys and these she expects will be used for reflective practice.

“At home, there is no space at the office, all will be done at home, I was lucky having a car journey to mull over, space to think, no time available at the office... or I think about someone while I am swimming through trial and error I have found what works for me. Even if the time was available the office has no quiet space” S.1.419

Supervision did not feature in S’s discussion of her new job. She feels that her supervision had been limited and in placement her practice educator was important in helping her learn about practice.

“I have only ever had case supervision, it has always been limited on time and the supervisor was always keen to get out because they had a million and one other things to do” S.1.440

“I don’t think based on my previous experience, don’t have high hopes of using supervision for reflective practice.....my previous supervisor, her manner, she wasn’t approachable” S.1.456

“No, and talking to others it was only when we were about half way through the placement that we realised that there was another way. Up until then we had all had the same experience and thought that was how it was meant, that was we all had, so that was the norm” S.1.463

The link between theory and practice S sees as her responsibility to maintain by reading and keeping updated via web sites including BASW. This site she sees as an important resource to her in her practice but also as a trade union.

“I’m worried about the accountability. This idea it could be my face on the news that was the idea of joining BASW, a union, they make it clear that if you go before the GSWC you need the support of someone else ...at the end of the day, that if I did something wrong I’m not convinced that an employer would be give me that support” S.1.534

This concern for support is based on the experience of others that she has seen face difficulty. This has created some anxiety. If it has happened to another it might happen to me.

“in placement and they went through the whistle blowing process and they got hung out to dry, basically they got no support, and I am not putting myself in that position.” S.1.549

S has a good sense of herself with regard to knowing what she does when she is stressed. She somatises stress and this comes out as illness after a longish period. Throughout her training she has seen that she is always physically unwell once a deadline has been met. Having recognised this tendency she has determined a fitness regime to keep her healthy. Exercise reduces her stress. Also she pays attention to what she eats and balancing work and social time. This includes housework balancing with social time with her partner.

“(Exercise) Calms me down, helps me sleep better” S.1.593

The second interview takes place just before 6 months have been completed because S and her partner have decided to leave Britain to go New Zealand. The job that she has involves a lot of travelling throughout the UK to review care packages for people with disability who cannot be offered the specialist services they need within the county.

“I haven’t really stopped, I can’t believe it is Christmas, can’t believe where the time has gone, I can’t.” S.2.130

“pretty manic, lots of travelling and things like that overall it has been ok but a bit of a shock to the system, I had no induction, day one I went in and by ten o’clock I had been allocated my caseload and bang, that was it,..... ummm so it was interesting” S.2.7

S felt that the experience so far had been good and that she had received a lot of support from both her peers and her manager. However she had not



been given an induction when she started. This did not happen as her manager had only just taken up her post and was not in a position to offer an induction.

“You could say that I got a lot of support from the team, we are a small team so it was quite good to ask people for help” S.2.14

“I started with 2 other people one NQSWs and one who has been qualified for a year, we are all of a similar age and get on well, we have shared things, books and articles, we have come across generally looking after each other.” S.2.162

“what happened was that my manager only started the week before I did so she couldn’t give me an induction as she wasn’t having one herself.” S.2.23

In this first six months there have been many opportunities for training and this has included being on the newly qualified programme.

“I was put forward for the NQ scheme. I’m on the tail end of that because it is coming out next year because of the assessed first year of practice that starts next year. So, there hasn’t been much enthusiasm for it shall we say, because everyone knows that we are the last lot going through it is all changing anyway, so no-one is very motivated to do much about it, it seems.” S.2.40

The programme is described as an evidence based portfolio. S finds the scheme repetitious and that it is time consuming. Given the constraints of the job and the travelling that she does the portfolio work is done in her own time.

“but I haven’t found that the scheme is very helpful so far because I am evidencing things that I am already doing and so far nothing has come up that I think I could do with more experience in, that because things are dealt with as they come up I either go away and do some research or I mention it in supervision” S.2.55

“Yes it is, I go and write down in bullet point format and write down the numbers and besides a corresponding evidence number, for example, case notes, and that it is it, and I haven’t found it very helpful, and it is very time consuming, no time in work because of my caseload, so I have to do it outside work in evenings and at weekends, and I would really rather not have to do it.” S.2.65

Protected time and more frequent supervision is also part of the scheme.

“I was meant to be having weekly supervision for the first month, then fortnightly, then monthly, I still only have monthly supervision. I do have supervision occasionally between that with another nqsw but that is only for the nqsw work ....umm but because of sickness and annual leave what happens in reality is that I have a longer supervision session once a month and we do everything then together as we can because my supervisor simply does not have the time, she was quite up front about that when we were put

forward that she did not have the time to offer weekly supervision, not that she wouldn't but she couldn't, she is not saying she is when she isn't it, is all very clear" S.2.27

A protected caseload is also part of the newly qualified programme. S is not clear what size her caseload should be but is aware that it is slightly less than a more experienced worker. However S is aware that it is very difficult to evidence complexity and that as all the service users worked with by this team have complex needs that cannot be accommodated in residential units within the county. If, as has happened to one of her service users, there are concerns about a person's safety the complexity increases but this is not easy to quantify.

"up again where it was, I am supposed to be having a smaller caseload so that is less complex but because no one specifies what that means so nothing happens. It is kept slightly lower than a more experienced worker on the team but it doesn't mean it a manageable caseload for a newly qualified worker, it just means that the box is ticked to say that I have a smaller caseload than other qualified members of the team" S.2.110

"that is the difficulty, trying to evidence the complexity" S.2.122

The highlight of the work for S is spending time with a service user and doing something ordinary like having lunch with the person; this gives an opportunity to have a relationship with the person, not just be a transient note taker who visits once a year. There had also been difficult times in the first 6 months the most recent being attacked by a service user during a review. At the time S was accompanied by a student in training and felt responsible for this person. It seemed that her experience of physical assault was minimised. S drove back home and then went to casualty at the local hospital and concussion was diagnosed.

"the situation was poorly handled he was in eyesight across the room and I became the target, I got concussion, this has been the low point, it has knocked my confidence, normally you have to be aware of risks but it is not normally an issue." S.2.151

"At the time I went into professional mode, I had a student with me, he was very shaken, I drove home stopped at the services and plied him with chocolate, I came home, did a report, then went to the clinic to be checked out, they said that I had concussion.2 S.2.452

S feels that she has no time during office hours to undertake reflective practice.

"It has been in my own time, there is not enough time in the office, it tends to be something that I do while driving" S.2.174

Alongside this S thinks that she does at least 6 hours a week overtime which is significant as she has a contract for 35 hours, less than the fulltime 37 hour contract of colleagues. She seems to be doing an extra day a week.

“about 6-7 hours a week on average but more when I am away” S.2.196.

“my supervisor does come round after a certain time and get us out the door, she is not going home herself but she does speak to us, she realises that she needs to give us a push. She does look after us” S.2.237

Alongside this, because her hours are different from her colleagues, she is often disturbed in non-working time by phone calls from colleagues who are at work. In the days that she is in the office the culture of the team is to leave at the end of the day in good time. This culture has been set by the manager who checks on her staff and reminds them to go home.

S has managed to continue to look after herself in a physical way by continuing an exercise regime. However she is aware that she is not so good at looking after her psychological and emotional wellbeing by asking for help from her manager or being able to say no when approached to take more work.

“generally quite good in doing things (reference to physical exercise) like that. What I am not so good at is saying when I need help” S.2.212

The role that S has did not match what her expectations of being a social worker in a statutory team would be. She expected that she would be spending much of her time sitting in front of a computer and justifying why she had taken certain actions. This is not the case but she does have little face to face time with services users in order to carry out their annual review. Usually about 2 hours. This time looks at the year that has passed plans for the future, and tackles any issues that there might be. The main difference between expectation and reality has been the support that she has within the team.

“There is the culture of going to each other for support. I hadn’t expected that, from my placement experience where every one left at 5 pm and if you were left with a complex case no one stopped to ask you about, while in this team ask if you need help and see things look a bit stressful you say can I do anything.” S.2.257

The role that S has with service users she finds hard to square with what she thinks of as social work. There is a lack of engagement with other professionals and working alongside other professionals to make plans for a person and operationalise them. She feels that the work that she did on placement with people who were in the process of making transitions either between units or into a placement for a first time, where there was a lot of liaising and co-ordinating to be done, is more like her view of the social work task.

“to my mind is not social work as I am simply filling in forms and asking questions. I don’t think you need to be a social worker to do annual reviews because most of the people are in stable placements which is why we can do annual reviews.” S.2.294

The skills which are important for this work are communication skills and this includes beginning to be familiar with British Sign Language, Makaton and other forms of language to use with people who do not communicate through speech. Organisational skills are also crucial and a good working knowledge of the Mental Capacity Act.

“being organised being able to juggle everything, organising meetings and reports with all these other professionals ,and for some reason whenever there is a social worker in the room everyone looks to them to do the planning, and all the rest of it. No-one looks to the nurse or doctor.” S.2.335

Supervision for S has not been in line with the NQSW scheme. However, she feels that weekly supervision would have been too much; every 2 weeks, moving to three weekly, would have been her ideal. Her experience is that in six months she has had three formal supervisions.

“even the monthly supervision is not monthly. Sickness and an emergency come up. I have been there 6 months and have had 3 supervisions and another booked for the end of December.” S.2.370

“I would like more formal supervision and have asked for it but my supervisor just doesn’t have the time.” S.2.387

When asked to sum up the experience of the first six months S felt that the time had been chaotic but full of learning.

The final interview took place via Skype as S had now moved to New Zealand. She is working in the national agency for child protection as a frontline worker in a team covering a city centre where there is a large Maori population. Since moving this is her second job. The first was in a small charity and S felt that the practice was poor and putting children’s safety at risk. She felt that the work was unsafe tried to challenge the organisation but was ignored so left to take her current job. This second is offering her a great deal of support and currently she is having weekly supervision and she is on an induction programme which will last seventeen weeks. Statutory social work is provided by a national organisation. Child protection teams have the same policies and procedures throughout the country which means that social workers can move between offices and move from one end of the country to the other and start work confidently knowing their way around the systems and being familiar with protocols and procedures.

“I get a whole heap of support I have a buddy who is a very experienced social worker who I pretty much do everything with and on Monday I have the beginning of a 17 week induction programme which involves e-learning and

off site training intensively for 3 weeks, and I have to do different tests and things to prove my knowledge.” S.3.40

Despite being in a major transition and having to learn a lot of new things in relation to child protection in a new country, S says that she has confidence in her abilities to be a social worker.

“I certainly feel more confident not second guessing myself as much” S.3.62

In the new work there is more time for reflection and there are tools which are designed to enable workers and supervisors to look at cases in a reflective way.

“what we have now is what are called case consults and there is a particular template is used which is so useful, basically you do a brain dump into a particular format which is about what your concerns are what the grey areas are what the strengths are. I find it so helpful and at the end of it there is a point where you draw it altogether and what practice tools that are available and what you have used and things like that, so you and your supervisor can then choose next steps.”S.3.72

The theme part of the discussion concerned working practice which is centred on the team and co-operative working. The teams work as a unit and workers do very little work on their own. Decisions are collective.

When asked to characterise her first year in practice S had not difficulty in saying

“Bloody hard work is the first thing that comes to mind” S.3.106

Going on to explain that there is a tremendous difference between what is taught in university and the reality of work.

“Yes, because the reality of social work is so different from what I was taught, this lovely idealised image we were taught in university in the classrooms. The legal issues in the classroom are black and white whereas in reality there are large amounts of grey areas”S.3.110.

“I thought that my last year at university would be the hardest because this is where this is where I did my modules, my dissertation and my placement, but I think that the first year in practice has been the hardest” S..3.116

Despite the recent change of teams S feels that the attitudes and expectations of her are much more balanced. There is a sense of the well-being of the workers being important.

“that you don’t work late unless it is a critical emergency. People have a lot more respect for work life balance and things like that, and putting yourself and your family first. We are allowed to take a number of discretionary days leave to keep our mental health and well-being” S.3.142

“the work still gets done and people work hard but the atmosphere is less stressful” S.3.157

This attitude to worker needs is mirrored by a computer system that indicates when workers should be taking a break. This means there are times in the day that those in the office break for tea and chat for a short time. If an individual fails to take a break the computer goes into hibernation.

“we have a work pace on our tool bar, if we get close to 10 the computer tells you, it then gets red and angry and it also flashes up morning tea, afternoon tea, and lunch time, forcing you to take a break, and if you don’t take a break and keep ignoring it the computer goes into hibernation mode for a period of time.”S.3.158

The workload is also monitored and maintained. The social workers average about 15 cases a person.

“People complain here about caseloads but compared to England they haven’t got a clue, they complain if they have a caseload of 15. I know people who are newly qualified with a caseload of 25 let alone the qualified people. It is just again because if you caseload get high you might have to stay late.” S.3.179

Another aspect of work that is very different is the work that she is doing with family groups. In the UK you would expect to work with the nuclear family and the immediate other family members like grandparents, aunts. In New Zealand a family network is a much larger system that includes those related and those not, like close neighbours and other clan members. This means that a meeting to sort out a family problem may include a large number of people.

S has made a huge change in her life by moving to NZ. The effect of this has been to increase her awareness of race issues. She is a minority being white She has experienced racism because of this which has been personally and professionally unsettling. On a personal level she has had to develop resilience. In New Zealand a person is able to say that they will not work with a white social worker as they will not understand my culture.

“More resilience because of moving away, there is a lot of racism I have been shouted at in the street and I find that upsetting, but I am getting a bit more resilient. I suppose me doing the course comes into play, I do have understanding of where the distrust and misunderstanding comes from.”S.3.253

“it is over a year, I keep thinking where has the year gone because I am now no longer newly qualified I am properly qualified. People come to the office and say I’m newly qualified and I think yes so am I, but now I think no, no longer can I say that, as it is over a year now” S.3.31

## Case study T

This participant was a self-funding student on the BA social work programme. She had left a career in adult education to retrain as a social worker. For her first year after qualification she had an unqualified post in the district council where she had been a student on placement. The lack of posts to apply for came as a shock because before beginning her training she did look to see what job opportunities there would be and at that time there were many posts available. At the end of her first year she was successful in obtaining a qualified social worker's post.

"when we started the course or just before I started, all of them had open applications for social workers so I thought yippee but at the end of last year it all changed and I started to panic then." T.1.27

"It has been uncertainty which leads to stress and anxiety and emotional cos you spent the last 3 years studying not get a job ...I'm one of the lucky ones I don't think up to last week no more than 10 of us got a job very few" T.1.309

T also has an issue about her level of confidence and so taking an unqualified job does seem to have taken the pressure off her, although she will receive lower pay.

"I didn't feel confident to go out and say that I am a social worker now, so for me that was like some sort of security, I won't be thrown into the deep wide world. The remuneration is not great in (named council), given that we are on the edge of London, but at the end of the day it is a job" T.1.148

T would like to be working with children's services. Her first placement was in a school but this was an unsatisfactory placement because the school had not created a clear role for a student social worker. The on site supervisor was a teacher.

"There I was in tears, I nearly threw it all in, in the first couple of weeks as the teachers used me as an LSA which I didn't mind but..." T.1.92

"I am an adult and not learning any social work from it" T.1.98

"I didn't want to assert myself, and create anything bad between the school and the university for future students, so I took a back seat, and then my tutor punished me for that and added 15 days to my placement because he said that I don't think you are not learning anything. I did tell him about my experience when he did my learning agreement but he didn't follow it up he was probably busy, but overall what I learned in my 3<sup>rd</sup> year placement as a social worker I didn't even learn a 10<sup>th</sup> of it in my first placement." T.1.112

T was seen as someone who was on an education placement, therefore was not allowed to see the case files of children within the school that social services had. Therefore T felt that she was not able to learn what the social work role was and that this has disadvantaged her in the hunt for a job. She

does not have social work child care experience to offer an employer although she has a background in working with young people in education and residential care.

“I feel disadvantaged as my peers in teams who went into schools got all the information. I felt disadvantaged as I do not have that experience... but with my learning outcomes for that year I was left making things up” T.1.365

This issue of placement was that T feels that there is no choice of placement; those who get good placements get the good jobs of their choice. Gaining a placement is competitive but the outcome of a good placement can be career changing.

“Yes, those who get good placements and the experience are those getting jobs, now one of the people who had a placement in a school who had a social worker with her got a job as the social worker. “T.1.388

“I wouldn’t take social workers out of schools but would change how things are managed and overseen” T.1.395

This does not seem to have been a good start for T and she said that it knocked her confidence.

Her last placement was with adult services in the transition team. Here the focus is working with people who are moving from children’s service to adult’s services. All the service users have disabilities. The current job that T has enables her to gain experience and is in a team and an area where she is familiar as it is where she did her final placement. The people and processes are the same. She is being given regular supervision and knows that her caseload will be around 20 and that she will carry some complex cases. T is clear that reflective practice is important to her in her work and in her personal life.

T uses exercise to take care of the stress of the job and knows that it is good not to just sit at home where she might overeat.

“gym there were other things going on at home. I said I am not to sit down at home and overeat cos I’m overweight already.” T.1.231

T is also acutely aware that she has financial debts. She has to take whatever job she can get and there is a sense of being trapped by circumstance even though she has retrained and gained a professional qualification.

“I’ve got 2 children. I have just finished the course left me with debt, and, have a student loan of £20,000.” T.1.240

“I don’t have that choice at the moment” T.1.341

T is clear that communication skills are of utmost importance to her work but that the work is also governed by financial constraints.



“your hands are tied, it is about the task at hand, solution focused because we have the funding issues within the work as such.... for most things the criteria for referrals, they don’t meet the threshold, it is really, really difficult” T.1.250

T believes that the training gives a more idealised model of practice and that from placement it is clear that there are constraints on working with service users.

“training, it is more or less you’re told do this or not do that, like no barriers, and you find this a bit on placement but when you get out there it isn’t like that, there are criteria to be met, thresholds to be met, the academic work doesn’t prepare you for practice, I can tell you that” T.1.261

“They (service users) are being fitted in to what is on offer.” T.1.282

Seeing need and not being able to respond is a real stress.

“I feel like crying thinking this person needs something and sometimes those who do meet the threshold don’t want it, and someone you really think would use it can’t get it.” T.1.289

The second interview took place at the end of the first six months. T had been appointed to a fulltime qualified social work post in an adult services team in the authority where she had just completed a year as an unqualified worker. T was not given an induction. This lack of induction meant that T was unaware of the different procedures, for example closing cases, and felt an idiot when the manager pulled her up for not closing cases appropriately.

“There wasn’t an induction as I had my last placement here and was in the other team” T.2.338

“but it is a different type of work, last year was continuous case management with service users now it is a like a conveyor belt, you go and do an assessment and they are not complex enough to be passed on to the team that does long term” T.2.17

T was now enrolled on the ASYE programme. This was important as in her unqualified post, although a qualified worker and asked to do qualified tasks her employer would not let her do the newly qualified social worker’s scheme. This scheme has been reconfigured to be the ASYE scheme.

“It hasn’t been too bad because I did the unqualified year but the thing that has made the difference has been the ASYE” T.2.5

“Ok, they say you are supported and have a reduced caseload and that 10% and that but no-one seems to know” T.2.8

“They say 23 is the 90%” T.2.29

The ASYE scheme is attached to a university and therefore has an academic component which is assessed.

“Yeah, there is work to be done for that portfolio, that is not too bad as you are reflecting on the work that you are doing, that is not too bad” T.2.42

“we have academic input from X university, two teaching days, we have a 2-3,000 word assignment to hand in and” T.2.58

T is clear that there is support for ASYEs and that there is regular supervision. Extra training is also available to develop skills and knowledge within the profession.

“I have normal case management supervision. For the first 3 months we had weekly ASYE supervision and group supervision every month, all the ASYE candidates come together” T.2.63

“I am happy with the support” T.2.75

“training course that meet your training needs, like things that were mentioned at university, but not in depth, you are allowed to do.” T.2.53

However the support does not help with the organisational thresholds which are the barriers that T finds when she does an assessment and then tries to supply a service.

“children and families, mental health, there is a year’s waiting list or the service you need does not exist in the local authority, so it is very frustrating.T.2.79

There is also a growing awareness that the training that T has had in critical analysis and assessment means that she often sees more than unqualified workers who go and assess. Without applying this critical facility and being concerned to look beyond the symptom to an underlying problem, T believes there is room for issues to be missed in assessment.

“sometimes I think why the hell did I go and do the degree because the unqualified workers in the team do the same work. They say the difference between qualified and unqualified is the fact that some cases are more complex but this is not known till you begin to unpack the work” T.2.81

“they (unqualified workers) are good workers but it is like a robot system this is what they have got, this is what we do, this is what we see, this is what we do” T.2.99

T has recently questioned the way the authority has been working with a service user who for many years had been receiving a certain type of service delivered in a specific way and is concerned about how this will be received by the stakeholders in the case.

"I am worried to open this can of worms, the borough is a small community, I am concerned about who has reviewed this, is it just me, because I am newly qualified, I will do a lot of research before I speak to the manager" T.2.116

T knows that if her assessment of the situation is accepted thousands of pounds will be saved but she may also be subject of a complaint and investigation.

"you think, this is a new job, should I just keep quiet, will they get rid of me" T.2.123

T is surprised by the amount of emotional baggage that she takes into her work and carries from it.

"The emotional baggage, have I assessed this and made an intervention that will hinder that person rather than support them, is there anything else I could have done? Another thing is the effects on family, they don't look at what the family wants, something for their loved one and say they will sue you and you start doubting your decision, could I stand up in court, and you know what, this is based on research, which is why I did this or that" T.2.143

"you have the responsibility on your shoulders as well and you have also got where it is the conveyor belt type of social work, I think did I get it, the whole thing is about go in, do the write up, go to panel, get the service close it, and move on, so in that process have I done the right thing for that person because very often these people are alone and vulnerable" T.2.171

"because the main issue is things in the press, you see social workers chastised for doing something wrong or taking the blame, it is usually that one case note you did not record and that worries, me did I cover everything" T.2.153

Over the six months T has more confidence in her decision making and is learning to be skilful in her use of the panel system in her local authority.

"I am getting more confident of making decisions on my own, you know what, I don't need a second opinion, this is it" T.2.162

"You learn how to get round the panel chairs, one of them will give anything if the person is over 90 so I push cases to her or find out when she is on duty." T.2.206

"You have to do a panel decision report which sets out how much services cost per week, for a month, over the year" T.2.221

T is aware that some of her training in best practice has already been put aside as there is no time for repeat visits to service users.

“in this job I don’t have time to go back and share with the service user and they don’t expect you to either. So that is another bit of my training gone” T.2.246

The context of the team is that they work in a large open plan area of a district council office. All facilities are shared by all those working in the local authority.

“I come in Saturdays sometimes to catch up with the write-ups because in the open office makes it difficult to concentrate” T.2.36

However she tries to maintain her overtime to about half a day a week extra.

“about 3/4/hours a week” T.2.28

Prior to the third interview T asked to change the time we had arranged and said that she was on a phased return to work after an accident; she had been away from work for about 9 weeks. This means that her ASYE year will be extended by this amount of time. Her academic work has now been completed

Over the second six months T has experienced both ups and downs in her work.

“ It has been good, plenty of ups and downs but it has been good, been a lot of you know the more complex cases, you can see the things that you were taught at university but you think that the thing remains that everything is resource led. Although you want to do more work the sort of team I am in is a quick turnover, go in, do an assessment, do an analysis, no resource to meet the analysis that you have made” T.3.8

This aspect of the job T finds frustrating as she sees needs that she cannot work with because of the criteria that she has to work too. Her council only meets substantial and critical needs. The judgement of what these criteria mean she also feels are subjective, because what she and a service user see as a substantial need may only be seen as moderate by panel members

There is a clear difference between what she was taught as best practice and what she does in her everyday work. Her team assesses need, provides the service, and then the case is closed. There is not checking as to whether the service is meeting the service users’ needs. If there is a new request it is likely to go to another worker so there is little continuity of service and she feels this is not what she was trained to do.

“don’t have that opportunity once you have gone to panel you are expected to close the case, not go back and check, because other ones come into your tray, and if that hasn’t gone you get pulled up for having too many in your tray so from our training we were taught to try it out, then go back, check it out, but there is not that opportunity, very disappointing .....Personally I feel that there is a lot more that I could do that processes don’t allow me” T.3.31

The system and bureaucracy feels like a weight in the everyday work and there are concerns about being told that they are not meeting the expected capabilities. This is characterised by T being concerned about the new weekly assessment targets that have been set while she has been away.

“while I was off they made this rule that you have to try to do 10 assessments and write-ups a week” T.3.61

T is concerned that this target is impossible and you cannot do your best work for the service user. There seems to be a tension here between professional practice and organisational expectation. When asked what might happen if the number is not met T thought that you might be the subject of a capabilities investigation

“Yeah, well the people I have spoken with haven’t managed to do it yet, but if one person does then everyone will be questioned... you could be pulled up on capabilities” T.3.74

This fast through put of work also raises anxiety about missing something in an assessment which could lead to professional problems, even loss of registration.

“I am putting my registration on line as they are likely to say, come on, you are the professional, you should have spotted that, but I haven’t got the time, you know you have got to do this or that and there is always the chance that you will miss something, in your head you are thinking of the next thing.” T.3.85

Despite all the concerns T is passionate about her role as a social work and enjoys her work with service users.

“ you meet some really lovely people” T.3.105

T does have regular supervision both with her line manager and the ASYE co-ordinator. This is a reflective space.

“Yeah, you do get time to reflect on the cases, I also have an ASYE supervisor” T.3.135

T is now at the end of her second year after finishing training and when reflecting on her ASYE year she felt that the time when she worked as an unqualified worker was a baptism of fire into the profession. In this role she realised how shielded she had been as a student. The bureaucracy and reorganisations were shocking.

“in my first job because it was the team where I did my placement I got no induction, just got my caseload on the first day ,and then I realised that being a student you are shielded a lot.” T.3.146

“your first 3 months is like shock, when I say shock, I mean shock like I have been here a year why don’t I know this.” T.3.150

In considering a symbol or image T gave two images, one for the first six months and one for the second. For the first it was her with flames all around from which there was no protection.

“flames everywhere.” T.3.171

After six months T has built an arch in the flames the flames are still there but she can now stand under the protection of her arch and the arch is getting bigger.

“ there is always the risk of being hurt flames were above and to the sides, and as long as you kept yourself within the arch you wouldn’t get hurt” T.3.172

In exploring the image the arch symbolises a growth in confidence and competence.

## Case study W

W graduated with an MA in social work and is working in a jointly financed and managed post in the field of addiction. Part of the post is working in a project administered by a charity, the other part being care management for a London borough. This is her first qualified social work post. W spent the first year following graduation working for a drugs and alcohol project where she undertook her final placement in an unqualified worker's post.

"like the work and think that more social workers should do drugs and alcohol work to be honest, so yeah, I am seeing it as good experience that I can get and I am getting money at the minute because I have lots of debts so the money that I need at the minute" W.1.28

"I have secured a job that I like doing and I have sort of looked for other jobs but haven't put massive effort in" W.1.282

W had no idea that there was such a status as a newly qualified social worker and thought that she could apply for any post that said it was for social workers. Her experience has been that she has been rejected from posts applied for with no explanation.

"I thought that if I had my qualification I could apply for any post but that is not the case, they have newly qualified roles in the county council for those who have only just qualified and they get doled out to those who have been seconded first and then there is a rough and tumble for the rest." W.1.43

W had not really thought about getting a post while she was on the course and had relied on her pre-training knowledge so the current reality was quite a shock.

"when we first started there were lots of social work posts and golden hello's all over the news. I don't think that is like that now and I didn't think that I wouldn't be able to go into any social work role either, I think that I was a bit naïve about it to be honest, I was the youngest in my class and I thought that this is what I am doing for the next 2 years and then I will get a job and that will be it, that is how I saw it." W.1.77

"If I didn't get a social work position I will be gutted if too much time passes, I don't know what the time limit might be." W.1.312

Being one of the younger people in the sample W had finished her first degree and gone to work for a year prior to social work training. She finds the expectations of her family difficult to manage.

"It is a bit stressful, because as I said I had that assumption I would finish and then get a job, it is stressful, as my dad is a stressful person and he keeps saying "when are you going to get a job" cos I am still living at home. "when are you going to get a job, when are you going to earn proper money and pay back all your debts". W.1.100

Alongside these expectations is the pressure of moving back home after her first degree. When asked about looking after her well-being W looked surprised and said she did not think about it. W is informally supported by her friends and the team of which she is a member. Formally she gets regular supervision.

W's work is targeted to helping support people and reduces their dependence on alcohol or drugs. This work has built into it reflection on progress for the client and W uses these cycles to consider her own work and planning for the client in a holistic way.

Skills used in her work that she highlights are communication. This is both on a personal level and a professional level.

"Communication is the one I most learned, in terms of things that I have learned it is the one that I most progressed in. In my first placement I wasn't confident about practice but in my second one I have jumped massively in my confidence in communicating with people, and because that is the one where I have made this massive transition that is the one I value the most."W.1.184

In considering her learning W was clear that the first year she learned more than the second year but where she learned most of her social work was in placement.

"there were several afternoons when I went in for my 4 hours when I thought I wasted an hour driving to Chelmsford to sit here for 4 hours, I have not taken in anything that I could not have done sat at home and read. I think in my placements I was very lucky in the placements that I got, without them it wouldn't have been as worthwhile"W.1.193

"From the practice teachers supervision was more social work based skills and knowledge, lots of reflective stuff and working towards the portfolio. W.1.220

W is clear that she was naive before her training about what she could do after as a qualified social worker. She had not heard of sponsorship before she went to her first day at university and is resentful of those sponsored as they get the available jobs and have a holiday over the summer. At the end of her first year she gained employment as a qualified social worker in a drugs and alcohol team. Her substantive post is in a charity but all her work is allocated by the local authority. She therefore has two supervisor'.

W did have a struggle to find a post and felt that her placement experience did not help her as her last placement was not statutory and her first placement was not seen as frontline work even though it was seen as a statutory post.

"when I was applying for jobs like X would not even give me an interview and I am convinced it is because I don't have front line statutory experience" W.2.197



"I remember thinking it is a shame my last placement isn't statutory rather than first as you get more opportunities it is just as it works out, some uni's let you find your own, I remember doing a tick box thing to show interest but.." W.2.213

W feels that her introduction to work has been good but slow.

"Good, good I spent a long time not being very busy because of the nature of the post. I'm kinda between two agencies and like liaising that took for ever, it was so hard, so until from September to December I had no clients whatsoever and you expect like the first month or two to be a bit quiet getting use to a new area and networking but it just went on and on" W.2.9

"I had such a slow start. I hear lot from the other newly qualified, their work pressure and stuff, my job is a lot easier, my case load is not as high and I think if I had to go into that I am not sure that I could do it as well" W.2.73

"The work is a lot different, actually similar people but I was in a much more therapeutic role than the one I'm in now" W.2.26

W did have an induction but it was long and drawn out and not planned by any supervisor or manager.

"it was a really long induction but I have said to my manager it was very led by me, also a lot of following and learning the ropes and she had been only there a few months and she had learned from the previous social worker" W.2.136

"I have been there six months I have only had cases for about 3 months" W.2.176

"you know things are not always written down" W.2.129

This lack of policy and procedures has made the beginning of her practice stressful even though she has had a long time to familiarise herself with her new job. Once her caseload has built she expects to hold about 15 cases

The local authority has agreed to fund her ASYE training.

"they are also funding me for my ASYE I actually have 3 supervisors at (charity) one who like does the day to day line management, supervisor for case management at the local authority, and I have an external ASYE supervisor who they pay to come and see me one week "W.2.35

Although W is happy with the programme and support that she is being offered, at the start she felt that her qualification was not being recognised.

"ASYE, I got a bit annoyed as it like invalidated what I had done a bit, like you have passed something and now too need to do this"W.2.184

However, compared to how a seconded colleague has been treated by their borough she feels that quite lucky to have been put on the scheme at all.

“one of the ladies in my small group was seconded by x to do her training and was working as an unqualified and when she came back they are paying her as an unqualified until she passes her ASYE, it is a bit cheeky isn’t it” W.2.226

This programme does not have a higher education input it is run by a consortium of London boroughs, but does have regular in-house input.

“ we have a reflective practice group once a month, we have core skills seminars once a month, we have the training we are suggested to go on and if enough of us go to a training he suggests we also have a discussion group afterwards as well”

W.2.1. 43

The diversity of the area of London has been a big shock to W but the most difficult bits of the post are having a lack of policy and procedures knowledge or documents for reference.

“more diverse than anywhere else I have worked that was quite a culture shock as I have only worked in Clacton and Colchester” W.2.96

“the most difficult bits is when I have like a crisis of confidence, like when I am not sure about the policies and procedures exactly “ W.2.116

W is clear that a lot of her time is spent in organising finance for rehabilitation treatment and is not therapeutically focused.

“More of my role that I would like it to be is about funding and saying can you bring that down in terms of money” W.2.162

“listening and compromising with people “W.2.158

Although W has been in post for six months she feels that she is at the beginning as she has seen no work through as yet. This means that she is not so confident in how she feels in the role of social worker.

“It literally changes everyday, there are days when I think I love my job, I am such a good social worker, and then there are days when I think, oh my god, why did I chose to work with people, why did I not choose to work with machines” W.2.254

W was interviewed a third time at the end of her first year. W was continuing in her post working in the drug and alcohol specialism. W has had a hard year but feels that this is because she has had some difficult personal issues which have taken her concentration away from work.

“Umm.....stressful, but I think that is mainly because of personal stuff that has been going on, I haven’t been concentrating as well as I could have but I

am due to finish my ASYE this week, the interview will be next week because I am off work this week so I won't have to do that anymore. " W.3.6

The input that she has received has been wide ranging and intense. The intensity of the ASYE programme has been maintained throughout the first year.

" It was like being on placement again because I had to do logs every month and supervision and reflective practice groups. I do have a couple more of those to do, although the paperwork is finished technically it goes up until October, the groups and stuff, I don't mind doing, they are interesting and the reflective stuff I get a lot out of it but not doing the logs will be great" W.3.13

The induction phase was experienced as long

"I had a really long induction, it was just because the way that my role is between 2 services"W.3.13

Now that induction is over W appreciates the flexibility that she has in her role.

"but once I got into it I manage myself I get a lot of flexibility in my work and work from home and stuff, sometimes I go half a week without going to the office" W.3.23

This flexibility is appreciated and she is conscious of how her role is different from local authority workers.

" there is still that distinction in my role I go into their team and I see how they work and how they are managed, that I see is a lot different from how I work and am managed. "W.3.33

W is proud of the work that she does.

"I am really proud of being a social worker and a lot of my friends don't know what I do or what that means but because I am proud of it and it is about me as a person not just a job "W.3.43

W has been surprised that the experience of becoming a social worker has been better than her expectations. She experiences that she has time to work with clients and is not as stressed as the statutory workers she knows and works alongside.

"I think my role is better than I expected because I have flexibility and I see all the stress of the statutory workers and I think how my caseload is and how I manage now, I think do I want to go into that stress role, I like the nicer side of things where you can get to spend time with clients." W.3.71

The experience of being a qualified worker is very different from her student experience but W believes this to be because she has more self-confidence

now. She enjoys the fact that other members of her area team come and ask for her advice.

"I am a lot more confident in what I am doing and as a student people don't come and seek you out for advice but now people come to ask advice"  
W.3.79

W when asked for an image or phase saw her confidence building over the year.

"Ummmm.....I think the main thing is building my confidence, I can see that building through the year, and when I look at all the crisis points that is one of the issues that I have had, that is the thing that comes up in all of them, how I am interacting with people and how I am fitting into the team and things like that." W.3.86

Reflective practice was said to be W biggest learning of the year. This is to apply reflective practice in a consistent way as opposed to a perfunctory way to tick the boxes, which she describes as her student experience. She now values reflective practice and feels that she is using it to enhance her practice.

"the reflective stuff and more aware of myself comes up quite often, The reflection I do now is nothing like what I was doing as a student, nothing at all and I think.. I remember being asked to do reflection as a student and we did all the logs and stuff but it was very perfunctory and it felt a bit like a word that you said and I didn't feel .... there was an awful lot of emphasis on it and how you are making use of it and I feel now I reflect on things and the use I make of it is very different" W.3.93

However W did not know the model of reflection she was using but it was one that was introduced in the ASYE reflective practice group. The method used involves consideration of a critical incident.

"you choose a critical incident and expand on it and then the group can ask questions but are not allowed to give opinions and then there is time when they go and reflect and then when we come back they have to say how they feel it went, what they have learned from that" W.3.111

W is clear that she has got a lot out of her ASYE programme. She is also aware that at the beginning she was not keen to take part in the programme as she thought that it was invalidating her social work qualification. This sense of the invalidation of training she thinks comes from the way that the ASYE programme was put across to the newly qualified workers. It was unclear at the beginning what it was all about. One aspect of being an ASYE that did anger her was her ASYE supervisor referring to her as a student in a written review presented to a panel. This she felt was because the supervisor also supervised students. However W was upset that her status had been misrepresented.

"I got really annoyed with my ASYE supervisor as she at the mid-way review in front of a panel she called me a student, I didn't want to say anything to upset the panel but it really annoyed me, like it really annoyed me, I am not a student." W.3.128

"My opinion of ASYE has changed what we have done was good, I can see the point of it and I think that it is a good idea" W.3.121

W has also shared with her employer that she thinks that the reflective practice groups should continue after the ASYE programme has finished.

At the end of her first year W has no plans to move on and is clear that she is enjoying the work that she is doing.

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